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THE TERRIBLE TRIO; or, The Angel of the Army.

A ROMANCE OF THE LONE STAR STATE.

BY "BUCKSKIN SAM"—Major Sam S. Hall,

AUTHOR OF "DIAMOND DICK," "THE LONE STAR GAMBLER," "THE TERRIBLE TONKAWAY," "KIT CARSON, JR.," "BIG FOOT WALLACE," ETC.



THUS HANGS LIONEL LACROSSE, AMONG THE SWARMING MYRIADS OF OWLS, SNAKES, RABBITS AND MARMOTS; HIS SENSES, FOR THE TIME, HAVING PROVIDENTIALLY LEFT HIM.

The Terrible Trio;

OR,

THE ANGEL OF THE ARMY.

A Romance of the Lone Star State.

BY "BUCKSKIN SAM,"

(Major Sam S. Hall.)

AUTHOR OF "KIT CARSON, JR.," "WILD
WILL," "DIAMOND DICK," "BIG
FOOT WALLACE,"
ETC., ETC.

PROLOGUE.

"Oh, my God! Hast thou forsaken me?"

These words shot up into the moonlit night, from pallid, trembling lips.

Agony of body, anguish of mind, horror and hopeless despair were blended in the piteous appeal; all of which were mirrored in the ghastly face that was upturned to the starry heavens, the dark, piercing eyes blazing with unnatural luster, seeming to gaze beyond the stars, seeking there the relief and mercy denied upon earth.

Yet the silvery moon rolled on, smiling placidly upon the scene.

And a terrible scene it was; for what can be more terrible than a strong man in helpless agony—the victim of torture and degradation, which he has been made powerless to resent or resist?

A strong, symmetrical man he was; he, in whose agony-drawn words our tale commences.

A man but little less than six feet in height, with muscular limbs, and an honest, handsome face, and long, dark-brown, wavy hair.

He is stripped to the waist, and from a wound in his breast, just below the collar-bone, flows a stream of blood down over the snow-white skin.

Buckskin breeches, held in place by a belt from which the arms have been taken, and high-topped boots, to the heels of which are buckled a pair of spurs, make up what remains of his costume.

The man's hands were bound fast behind him, his head is thrown back, and his eyes cast skyward; his whole frame leaning to the rear, his weight being thrown backward, resisting his onward course, his heels striking in the earth, as he is being dragged over the ground.

Two lariats are secured around his waist, and each of these is held by a paint-daubed Apache warrior, who drag their white captive along; while, behind them, come other most hideous braves, their snake-like eyes glaring with exultation from between the bars of gypsum and vermilion, as with their arrow-points they prick the tender flesh of their victim.

His back is a mass of blood from his wounds, but not one iota does this torture cause him to change his position. He still hangs back, forcing at last two more braves to help at the lariats.

The ground is level in every direction, though broken by little hillocks, at the side of each of which is a hole down into the earth.

Afar to the north, as well as to the south, is a dark line of timber, marking the course of a river.

The rivers are the Rio Concho and Rio Colorado.

It is the great dog-town of West Texas, into which the captive is being dragged; but the marmots sleep in their holes, as do the rabbits and rattlesnakes, and the owls dart down into the dark depths at the approach of man.

A score of Apaches follow on after those who drag and urge the captive, and two of these carry between them the tongue of a Government wagon, near to the end of which is attached a whistle-tree.

These hideous savages are bow legged from being continually mounted on horseback since their childhood.

They are not accustomed to walking, and in consequence their pace and motion tend to add to their unearthly appearance. Bows and arrows, in buffalo-skin quivers, hang at their backs, as do their scalp-decorated shields; while long scalping-knives are at their belts.

The tiny silver ornaments in their long black hair glitter in the moonlight, while some flaunt many-colored feathers, one having three plumes, black as night, and a breastplate of silver in

the shape of a crescent moon. A hideous scar extends from this brave's temple to his mouth.

On they hurry, naught but the rattle of their arrows breaking the awful stillness—on like fiends of the night sent forth from Hades to pollute the earth with their tread. On, and yet on, the heels of their captive striking against one of the little hillocks, and then into a hole, when he braces himself, causing the braves who pull at the lariats to come to a halt. But it is only for an instant, for the dread journey is continued.

It is almost as light as day, yet not once does the tortured man cast a glance at his merciless captors, his eyes still being bent upward.

At last a guttural order from him of the breastplate is given, and all suddenly halt.

The heel of the wagon-tongue is thrust into one of the dog-holes and held upright, while a dozen knives loosen the earth of the adjacent mound, which is pushed around the pole, those who hold it in position stamping the dirt down compactly.

Soon the tongue stands firm with a lariat dangling downward from the iron-bound end. One end of this rope is now secured around the body of the suffering captive, beneath the arms. His wrists are cut loose from behind his back, and a lariat secured to each, one being thrust and drawn through each ring at the end of the whistle-tree.

Two braves now grasp the slack of each rope and stand ready to pull the captive upward.

He stands erect now, gazing upon his torturers with hatred and disdain. Even the savage Apaches look on him now with something of admiration.

He well knows that his suffering is soon to be increased a hundred-fold; but still defiance shoots from his eagle eye, and is shown in the poise of his form.

"White warrior heap brave," said he of the breastplate, who was evidently chief of the war-party.

"Bimeby call on Great Spirit. Bimeby rain of sorrow—rain of torture fall from eyes. When moon shine, can count stars. When sun come, can count heap plenty rattlesnakes. When sun come, heap not dead. White warrior want water. Black wolves jump at feet. Big black birds pick out eyes. Then no count stars when moon come again. Big wolves scratch up dirt. Pole he fall down. White warrior fall down. Wolf bite. Rattlesnake bite. Buzzards fly thick. White warrior never see lodge—never see sun-hair squaw. Make talk with Great Spirit. Sing death-song.

"Apache-land no good for white braves. All sing death-song. Waugh! It is good."

The captive gazed unflinchingly into the eyes of the Apache chief, while he said, in a deep, firm voice:

"Dog of an Apache! Cut the lariats that bind me and give me a knife, and I will make you and your coward followers sing your death-songs. The Great Spirit will not allow you to succeed in your hellish plans; and, should I escape the doom you have prepared for me, I swear that I will be terribly avenged.

"You shall hear my yell in the Apache Mountains across the Pecos. I shall eat and sleep, only that it may give me strength to follow your trails. Do your worst! I shall pray for strength to bear all you may inflict upon me. Leave me, you Apache cowards! Your presence pollutes the air that I am forced to breathe!"

"Waugh!" exclaimed the Apache chief, and the ejaculation was echoed by his braves. "Heap good death-song. It is good. Sun-Hair is our captive—Sun-Hair, daughter of Fire Spirit. She heap good medicine."

Waving his hand as a signal, the chief stepped backward, and the next moment the white captive was jerked to the top of the pole.

One brave now sprung upon the shoulders of another, while a third supported him as he tied fast the wrists and secured the lariat that was around the captive's body, beneath the arms, to the end of the pole, the slack of each rope being severed.

A long-drawn groan of agony burst from the lips of the sufferer, while the blood welled afresh from his wounds.

His feet were next secured to the pole, some four feet from the ground, and this done the Apaches drew off in a body and viewed the victim of their cruelty for a moment.

Then they all bounded away westward, on the back trail.

And the silvery moon shone down upon the

deathlike face of the man, thus being crucified, his blood-stained body presenting a sight to torture any observer, except savages like those who had condemned him to such a fate.

And his glassy, agonized eyes became fixed upon the shining moon, while darkest, blackest despair ruled his brain and agony racked his stalwart form.

Deep moans at times burst from his parched and trembling lips, and his hard, firm flesh and muscles quivered, as does an aspen branch after the touch of a human hand.

CHAPTER I.

BLACKWELL, THE BLACKBIRD.

LACROSSE RANCH, on Salado Creek, some fifteen miles northwest of San Antonio, consisted of six hundred and forty acres of land, but not more than twenty were inclosed for the purpose of raising corn and wheat. This was in a long, narrow stretch by the creek—in fact, the bottom land.

Major Lawrence Lacrosse, the proprietor, was quite a wealthy man, owning many thousand head of cattle, besides being interested, in a small way, in breeding mules and horses. His cattle ranged far up and down on each side of the creek at the time of which we write. No herders were employed, the owners of stock banding together in the spring, for marking and branding, and in the fall—the general "round-up"—when the four-year old beeves were separated from the other stock and corralled, to be sold to speculators.

The dwelling of Major Lacrosse was a commodious log-house, or what might well be taken for two houses, some fifteen feet apart. Both, however, were covered by the same roof, the space in the middle of the building allowing the cool northerly winds free circulation.

This wide passage was a favorite place to sleep in during the hot nights of summer, hammocks being suspended in it for that purpose.

A wide veranda extended the whole front of the dwelling, which commanded a view of the creek bottom up and down stream, the timber being but a rifle-shot distant from the house, the scattering oaks that grew around the building affording a grateful shade.

Up the veranda-posts grew climbing roses and other vines, which covered the roof, hanging from its edges in graceful festoons, and almost continually covered with brilliant and fragrant flowers.

Back from the dwelling a dozen yards, was the cabin of the house servants; and, to the west, running parallel with the stream, was a long line of corrals, so near together that, by opening the gates which swung in opposite directions, the inclosures were connected, and cattle could be driven from one to another.

The sloping ground in front of the house was carpeted with rich grass and flowers; the scattering oaks giving it a park-like appearance.

Major Lacrosse was a veteran of the Mexican war, who, upon peace being declared, had taken up this section of land, and established himself permanently, with his young wife, who, like himself, was a native of Louisiana.

Shortly after the birth of a son, however, Mrs. Lawrence died; and, for a time, the major was prostrated with his great grief. He no longer took any interest in his business affairs, and vowed that no woman should ever take the place of his deceased wife.

Unlike most men, he kept his vow; but, after a year or two of mourning and depression, he plunged into business with double the interest he had ever before displayed, and soon was in a most prosperous condition financially, indeed on the road to certain wealth.

Upon his infant son, the major lavished his heart's best affection; the little one being placed in the care of a faithful slave, who gave the child her undivided attention.

The boy grew up, the pride of his father, beloved and respected for his generous heart and his noble honesty of character; claiming from his beauty of person as well, the admiration of all who came in contact with him, except such as were jealous of him because of his manifest superiority.

As a horseman and hunter, he had no equal on the Salado Creek, and he could throw a lasso as skillfully as any of his father's vaqueros.

At the time we wish to bring the major's son, Lionel Lacrosse, before our readers, he was about twenty-two years of age, and a model of strength and manly beauty.

The major almost worshiped Lionel, who bore a strong likeness to his dead mother; and the father and son were as two boys when together, so free and happy were they when in the company of each other.

But Major Lacrosse had suffered so many hardships during the campaign in Montezumaland, that he seldom rode far from home. As the years rolled on, and Lionel had finished his studies in a private boarding-school in Eastern Texas, he began gradually to leave most of his business affairs in the hands of his son, who gladly relieved his father to the extent of his knowledge and power, studying in every way to make things run smoothly for his aged parent.

For some six miles below Lacrosse Ranch, on both sides of Salado Creek to the stage-road of the Austin and San Antonio line, which passed through the German settlement of New Braunfels, on the Guadalupe River, were scattered other ranches, some of the owners of which made a specialty of breeding hogs, and others sheep, while a few had invested their capital in horses and cattle, as was the case with Major Lawrence Lacrosse.

These rancheros often made up equestrian parties, including their wives and daughters, visiting each other, and also other prominent settlers on the Guadalupe River.

Shooting-matches were very popular, as were also trials of skill with the lasso; wild steers and horses being driven in from the prairie, in full view of the ladies, and the older members of the party, while the young Texans performed feats of horsemanship and rope, each vying good-naturedly with the other to win the praise and commendation of the spectators.

And in these Texan sports Lionel Lacrosse almost invariably threw his companions into the shade; but he received the cheers and applause bestowed upon him with modest diffidence, showing naught of pride or exultation.

Nevertheless, as might be supposed, taking the general run of human nature into consideration, Lionel, by his superiority in almost every grace and accomplishment, made enemies; many of the young rancheros hating and detesting him, though they feared to show these feelings to any extent.

Every triumph of the young man caused his father much pride and happiness, and he took great delight in accompanying his son to all social gatherings, the latter attending these entertainments more to please his father than to gratify himself.

However, the time was to come when his feelings and inclinations were to be greatly changed.

Situated as he was, with all the luxuries that were attainable in that section of the country at his command, and with great wealth in prospective, his future life-trail seemed destined to be bordered with flowers, and arched by a bright and cloudless sky.

And thus it seemed to Lionel himself; for he loved his home and father, and was happy in both, little dreaming what the future had in store for him—little thinking that he was destined to experience more torture of mind and body than any one in a hundred thousand are called upon to suffer.

But before this was to come upon him, he was to enjoy such extreme happiness as he had never dreamed of in his wildest fancy—a happiness that would cause his future anguish and agony to bear with ten-fold force upon him.

Some three miles down the Salado from Lacrosse Ranch lived quite a wealthy ranchero, William Brown by name, whose family consisted of a wife and three children; the eldest a son named Baldwin, but who was familiarly known everywhere as Baldy Brown.

Baldy was the same age as Lionel Lacrosse, and the other two children were quite young girls.

It so happened that in the year 185—, a brother of Mrs. Brown, Captain William Warrington, of the —th U. S. Infantry, a portion of which was stationed at San Antonio and the remainder of the regiment at different frontier posts, came, while on a short furlough, to visit his sister.

Captain Warrington was a widower, with but one child—a lovely daughter named Winnette, but called Winnie by all with whom she was intimate.

Winnie Warrington was just seventeen, with bright blue eyes and golden hair, which she wore, girl-like, flowing free. She was of medi-

um height, and with a constant flush upon her cheek that rivaled the bursting rose-bud.

Graceful as a prairie fawn, bright and joyous, continually roaming the creek-bottom and plain, she was one that banished aught but happiness wherever she went; and her father, although considered a martinet in his regiment, put no restrictions on the actions or movements of his lovely daughter.

The advent of Winnie Warrington on Salado Creek created intense excitement, especially among the young rancheros; and Lionel Lacrosse was not long left in ignorance of her presence in the neighborhood.

Baldy Brown, who was a sincere friend of Lionel, was extravagant in his descriptions of his cousin Winnie's great beauty; and the young ranchero, for the first time in his life, felt an interest in such topics, and at once accepted the invitation of Baldy to visit him and receive an introduction to the "Angel of the Army," as he facetiously termed her. A shooting-match was gotten up in honor of the new arrival, and the young people of the neighborhood were not slow in getting together.

Lionel was more particular in his toilet than on any previous occasion. He was also doubly careful to have his rifle cleaned, and the silver ornaments polished; and this fact was noticed by Jim, his body servant, who commented upon it with Aunt Huld, the cook.

"Mars' Lionel am gwine ter fall in lub with dat army gal, dead suah, you mind!"

Quite a number of people were congregated upon and near the wide, roomy veranda, and all eyes were fastened upon the young ranchero, as he dashed toward them, elaborately gotten up in a fancy buckskin suit, with a wide-brimmed black sombrero, presenting a very manly and striking appearance.

Dismounting some fifty yards from the dwelling, Lionel loosened the lariat from his saddle-horn, and secured his horse to a tree; then, with a rifle carried gracefully in hand, he approached the house, Baldy Brown meeting him half-way.

Among the assembled guests were a number of the young men who had for some time felt a strong enmity toward Lionel Lacrosse, born of the knowledge that he was, in every way, so much their superior; and they were far from pleased to see him on the present occasion.

Well knew they that none present could equal him in the day's programme of sports, or trials of skill.

The leader among these young men was one Bird Blackwell, who was also present. But few men on the border escape being dubbed with some *sobriquet*, and Bird was not exempt; being known far and wide as "Blackbird." He, as well as those with whom he affiliated was addicted to drinking and gambling; and, although furnished with abundance of money by a wealthy father, had the name of being "loose in the deal," that is, of cheating at cards.

But he was of good family, and had the *entree* into the best society. Hence his presence at the Browns'.

Much to the disgust and indignation of Baldy, who could not well avoid inviting him, Blackbird was in earnest conversation with Miss Warrington, at the very moment that he advanced with his friend Lionel Lacrosse.

However, at the moment of introduction, when the eyes of Winnie met those of Lionel, he felt that her gaze was in consonance with her former peal of merry laughter—a sound that had quite electrified him—and his whole being was ruled by a look from her bright blue eyes.

Never before had he felt such ecstatic feelings.

It seemed as if the world, as it had appeared to him previously, was all a dream, dull and utterly meaningless.

Soul gazed into soul, and man and maid each felt and knew that they had met their fate.

Both almost trembled, as they stood speechless, and the conventional greeting they had framed to speak died to a whisper on their lips.

CHAPTER II.

NOT RUNNING SMOOTH.

So embarrassed did both the young people act at this, their first meeting, that Baldy Brown good-naturedly suggested a walk to his

fair cousin, and invited Lionel to accompany them.

But, deep and impressive as were the thoughts of Lionel and Winnie, they were as a ripple on a lake's surface to the raging sea, in comparison with the fury, the jealous frenzy of Bird Blackwell, who, like all the young rancheros, had fallen madly in love with Winnie.

Blackbird was not an inappropriate cognomen, even when the young man's character was not taken into consideration; for Bird Blackwell was dark-skinned and swarthy, with black, treacherous-looking eyes and ebon hair; tall in stature, as was Lionel Lacrosse, but thinner in flesh, and with a slight stoop in his shoulders. This last, his associates laughingly asserted, came from bending over a card-table.

He had been engaged in more than one "personal difficulty," but had, as many said, "the devil's own luck," escaping each time with slight wounds, or none at all.

He had, indeed, the name of pulling trigger in one duello before the word, killing his antagonist; who was a penniless cowboy, without friends to avenge him.

Blackbird's face wore a most devilish scowl as he noticed the unmistakable interest that Winnie Warrington betrayed for Lionel, and the latter for her. And when the two young men walked away with the angelic object of his passion, neither of them deigning to take the slightest notice of him, he was murderously furious, and would have shot his rival with as little compunction as he would have felt in crushing the head of a rattlesnake. Not a few of the guests observed his excitement, and made a mental note of it, believing that matters would not end there, but that blood would yet be spilled.

This Blackbird indeed vowed, and it was a vow that he would keep uppermost in his mind until fulfilled.

He felt sure that some opportunity would present itself during the day, and he stole away from the assembly down to the creek bottom amid the dense timber, and there seated himself, nursing his fierce anger in his bosom.

So infatuated was he with the laughing, blue-eyed beauty, that he felt he could give up everything to win her. With this thought, and close following upon it, came a resolve to possess her, even though she should spurn his love. He would abduct her and fly toward the Rio Grande, beyond pursuit.

He knew where his father kept a large amount of money, and this he would appropriate.

It would be his eventually, and this was an epoch in his life when it was most needed.

With such thoughts ruling his brain, Blackbird sat on the creek bank until he had wrought himself up into a more murderous fury than when at the ranch; and had Lionel appeared upon the scene, he would without doubt have forced him into a duel.

Nor was his rage abated when, upon returning to the ranch, he discovered the pair walking amid the scattered oaks; and both so much interested in each other, that they were ignorant of the fact that the eyes of most of the company were bent upon them.

This was not strange, for a handsomer and more graceful pair could not well be found; each seeming to have been created for the other.

The guests enjoyed themselves as they pleased until dinner was announced. This was quite a grand affair, the tables being set beneath the shade of the oaks; and, to increase the jealous fury of Blackbird, Lionel Lacrosse was seated beside Winnie Warrington.

But a short distance from them, were Blackbird and a number of his dissolute companions; he having gotten them together previous to the dinner-hour, and treated them freely to brandy, which he had brought in his saddle-bags.

Every motion of the fair girl was watched by him; but, by a powerful effort of the will, he kept down all signs of his insane rage and jealousy.

But his brain was ever active, and it was with exultant satisfaction that he saw the displeasure of Captain Warrington at the sudden intimacy which had sprung up between the young ranchero and his fair daughter.

It was evident to Blackbird that the captain was anything but pleased with the turn affairs had taken.

That he was a passionate man could be readily seen; and, to the gratification of the villainous watcher, he heard him speak sharply to his daughter, who looked up in amazement at a harshness that was unusual with him.

His manifest displeasure caused the conversation between Lionel and Minnie to flag, and both to become more reserved. The young ranchero was pained at having, as he judged, made himself too familiar on short acquaintance, to the extent of offending Captain Warrington.

The host, who sat at the head of the table, the captain being seated next him, and Baldy being Lionel's *vis-à-vis*, had both noticed the growing familiarity between the young couple, and also the apparent displeasure of the captain. This latter caused them to feel unpleasantly, and consequently a depression of spirits was manifest at that end of the table.

This so pleased Blackbird that he further masked his jealous rage, and engaged in boisterous banter with his comrades; all the time, however, studying those in whom he was most interested.

When the feast was over, Captain Warrington, without ceremony, took the arm of his daughter, and with a cold stare at Lionel, walked into the house.

Baldy immediately took the somewhat disconcerted young man under his own especial care, without once referring to his uncle's behavior at table.

Soon after, all congregated on and near the veranda to witness the shooting-match. Lionel, as usual, came off victor in this, as in several feats of horsemanship. None rejoiced, or manifested more pleasure at this, than Winnie Warrington.

Blackbird, conscious that he could not excel, refrained entirely from joining in the sports.

But the villain was not idle.

He well knew that Lionel was ill at ease on account of the displeasure of Winnie's father. He had noticed that the latter, who was addicted to pipe-smoking, had, previous to the dinner, retired to the river-bottom for the purpose of indulging in the weed; and he was confident that the captain would do so again, as soon as the sports of the day were over.

While meditating upon this, Blackbird recalled the fact that he had a drug in a small vial in his pocket that he kept for the purpose of adding to his flask of liquor, when he wished to offer it to one whom he thought of fleecing at cards.

This drug acted differently upon persons of different temperaments; some being made simply stupid by it, while others became reckless and belligerent.

Those who were affected in the latter way, he had noticed, were generally of an extremely nervous temperament. Such was Captain Warrington, and Blackbird resolved to "doctor" a flask of brandy and offer the gallant officer a drink, if he could get the opportunity.

With this fiendish plan to excite the captain, Blackbird made his way to the bottom timber, and lay in wait for the father of the maiden, whom he had sworn to possess, by fair means or foul.

And means most foul he was about to take to further his devilish plans; although he had not the remotest idea that his act would terminate in the manner it did—a proof that the Evil One favors his own.

Seated in a thicket, Blackbird soon caught sight of the approaching form of Captain Warrington, filling his pipe as he came. Springing to his feet, the young ranchero sauntered toward the officer, pretending not to have observed him.

Upon nearing the captain, he glanced up quickly in assumed surprise, and said:

"Ah! Is that you, Captain Warrington? You startled me somewhat, for I had thought myself alone in these solitudes. I have just been to the creek to indulge in a drink of cognac and water, not wishing to display the liquor before the ladies.

"Will you imbibe, sir? I assure you it is a fine article; from sunny France, without doubt."

"Thanks, Mr. Blackwell. I don't mind taking a drink. I believe it may assist digestion, for I have eaten heartily. My regards, sir."

Drinking several swallows from the flask, the captain returned it, saying as he did so:

"You are right, Mr. Blackwell. I consider myself a good judge of liquor, as do most of us army men, and that is really a superior

brand. I am greatly obliged, and should you visit San Antonio, I shall be pleased to return the compliment."

"Thanks, very much. I am extremely pleased to have formed your acquaintance; but excuse me, I have absented myself too long from my friends. I see you have come for a quiet smoke, and if you are anything like myself, you will not care to indulge in conversation while thus engaged."

"You are very considerate," returned the captain. "I confess that I do enjoy my pipe alone. I will not detain you from your friends, but will see you later."

The two parted, but Blackbird proceeded but a little way when he plunged into a thicket, crawled to the opposite side, and sat watching every movement and step of the captain. The crouching plotter soon had the satisfaction of seeing Captain Warrington walk with hasty stride back and forth, gesticulating wildly and talking to himself, as if insane.

His actions and manner became more and more excited, his eyes flashed, and he beat the air with his clinched fists.

That the captain knew nothing whatever in regard to Lionel, Blackbird felt assured, for he had overheard Baldy Brown say to his father that he was sorry his uncle had not been informed of the standing of young Lacrosse, and of his noble character and sterling worth.

Knowing this, Blackbird was confident that the intense rage born of the drugged brandy, or brought to the front by it, pointed toward Lionel, and he hoped, for once, that the latter had again sought the side of Winnie when her father had left her for his post-prandial smoke.

Not long was Blackbird kept in suspense.

Captain Warrington soon rushed past his covert, going toward the ranch, with flashing eyes and clinched fists, curbing his passion somewhat as he advanced. Blackbird followed close after, and climbed into a moss-draped tree on the edge of the timber.

He could hardly repress an exultant shout, when he perceived Lionel and Winnie walking arm in arm on the lawn, and the captain striding madly toward them.

So interested were the youthful pair in each other that they did not observe the captain as the latter proceeded toward them at a rapid pace.

All on the veranda, as well as the plotter in the tree, noticed the approach and extravagant actions of the young lady's father. But a very short space of time elapsed when Lionel and Winnie, hearing some one coming up behind them, stopped and turned about.

No sooner did the young girl catch sight of her father's face and attitude, than she gave a scream.

At the same moment Captain Warrington, his features contorted with rage and fury, sprung forward, drew back his arm and struck the young man in the face.

Lionel Lacrosse had not dreamed of an assault of this character, and consequently did not attempt to ward off the blow. He reeled backward, his face turning the pallor of death, and Winnie Warrington, with another piercing shriek, sunk upon the grass and flowers, pale and senseless.

CHAPTER III.

A DEMON DEED.

FILLED with exultant joy at the success of his dastardly plot, Blackbird came down from his perch.

All now, he was confident, would be at an end between Lionel Lacrosse and Winnie Warrington.

It was possible that Captain Warrington, after he had recovered from the effects of the drugged brandy, and had been informed of his outrageous treatment of Lionel, might apologize. Indeed, this was probable; and, if so, all his plans would come to naught. This had not occurred to him at the first.

Should the captain fully realize the state of mind into which he had been thrown, and decide that his insane action must have originated from the liquor that he had drank, the tables would be turned, and he, the plotter, would be entangled in his own act.

Captain Warrington was a soldier and would demand satisfaction at ten paces, with pistols, beyond a doubt; and then, all chance of gaining the hand of Winnie by fair means would be at an end.

The more Blackbird thought the situation over, the more appalled he became. He realized that he had made a fool of himself, while he

had supposed he had executed a most cunning plot, and one that in no way could be traced to himself.

There was but slight room for any hope of carrying out his intentions if the captain should attribute his temporary madness to the brandy.

He could call upon Mr. Brown, Baldy, and others to prove that the officer had shown much anger at the table; and that, when leaving it, he rudely took his daughter from her escort, without a word of apology, and not deigning to notice him in the least.

In addition to this, Blackbird would take his oath that he had seen the captain, while in the thicket, acting in an insane manner.

Perhaps this would get him out of the scrape.

Then, again, there was another chance, which would insure him against complicity in the difficulty. It was this. Possibly Lionel might at once demand satisfaction from his insulter; but this seemed improbable, on account of the young planter's *enchant* for Winnie.

Then, too, people must have noticed that he himself had been greatly impressed by the blue-eyed beauty. They had also seen that he had been greatly infuriated at being parted from her by Baldy and Lionel.

Blackbird now remembered that he had shown much indignation at that time; and, should the captain decide that he had been drugged, this circumstance would go far to prove that he was engaged in some plot against them, in which the drugged brandy acted a part.

His intention, on leaving the tree, was to gain the ranch by a circuitous route, and then join the now-excited crowd. He now hesitated, however, and again climbed to his old position.

He gazed quickly out upon the lawn, and saw that Winnie, apparently insensible, was being carried into the house. Lionel stood, with folded arms and pale face, his forehead swollen by the blow; while, near at hand, Captain Warrington was struggling in an endeavor to again spring upon the young ranchero.

This caused Blackbird much apprehension, for it proved that the drug was acting more than he had intended; in fact, to a noticeable degree.

Those who held the captain, and those who stood about the spot, as well as Lionel himself, could not but decide that the unhappy man was not responsible for his cowardly and uncalled-for conduct. They would know that he was not himself, and would probably come to the conclusion that he was insane from drink.

Then the question would arise—and would be put to the captain when he recovered—where did he get it?

There could be no doubt that he would remember it, and also that he had taken but one drink.

This revelation would cause all to decide that something besides brandy must have been in the flask, and his infatuation for Winnie and jealousy toward Lionel would be recalled as his object in drugging the father of the young lady.

Take it all in all, Blackbird was forced to decide that he was in a tight place, from which there seemed, as far as he could determine, no opening for escape, and retain at the same time any chance of gaining the love of Winnie.

He felt that he could wade through blood to win her affections—that he could brave any danger, look death in the face; ay, and barter his very soul for her love.

But a short time elapsed when the watcher saw that Captain Warrington had become more calm; and Baldy Brown left him with his father and some friends, taking the arm of Lionel, and walking with him slowly toward the house, where the greatest excitement prevailed among the female guests.

Lionel waited outside, while Baldy went into the dwelling, apparently to gain intelligence of the condition of his fair cousin. He soon returned, seemingly much excited, as he gazed toward his father and the neighbors, who were approaching with the captain.

Baldy appeared to be reasoning with Lionel, who soon walked toward his horse, and mounting the same, rode toward the creek, disappearing in the timber.

About the same time Captain Warrington and those who held him entered the house, followed by such of the guests as remained.

The watcher was now most perplexed.

He felt sure that his victim would soon recover, and would naturally, if he recalled the meeting and friendly drink, inquire for him, and with no friendly intent.

The departure of Lionel prevented an immediate apology, should the captain be so inclined. This was some consolation; but no sooner had the thought entered Blackbird's mind than he was dumfounded by a sight which caused him to nearly lose his grip and fall to the ground.

Hearing a swishing of bushes in the direction of the river, he had turned his head quickly in that quarter, and, to his astonishment and apprehension, discovered Lionel Lacrosse walking leisurely through the bottom, when he had supposed him to be far up the stream, and riding toward his home.

Lionel did not have his rifle with him, but carried, as was the universal custom, his revolver and bowie at his belt.

At first Blackbird, as does every guilty man, feared that the young ranchero was in search of himself; but, upon second thought, he reflected that this was impossible, as Captain Warrington had not recovered sufficiently to reveal any particulars.

On down the Salado went Lionel, soon disappearing from the view of Blackbird, who decided that the former had agreed to wait until Baldy brought more favorable intelligence in regard to the state of Winnie.

It was not a very comfortable position in the tree, and Blackbird descended, making his way through the dense undergrowth toward the river, where it was more open, scattering thickets being the only obstruction to the view.

Within one of these Blackbird ensconced himself and watched for the return of young Lacrosse, hoping that he might be able to judge by his face the state of his mind. Expecting Baldy to join Lionel, Blackbird at times cast glances up the stream through the timber. His condition was by no means an enviable one.

For a full quarter of an hour did the concealed plotter crouch in the thicket, no sound striking his ear except the chirp of wood-birds, the hum of insects, and the ripple of the adjacent stream.

At the end of that time, much to his anger and apprehension, he heard the tramp of horses' hoofs out on the "open," approaching the ranch from down-stream. Soon he recognized in the loud voices of the riders, who had evidently been drinking freely, his crowd of associates.

He had no doubt that they had met stockmen, who had just come from the Guadalupe over the open plain by the route which he would have taken, and having reported to his friends that no one had crossed the prairie north, the latter had returned, doubtless supposing him to be still at the Brown ranch, or overcome by drink, and sleeping it off in the timber.

This return of his associates was most ill-timed, and greatly maddened Blackbird, who indulged in an unusually large drink of brandy from a flask which he carried in a side pocket, and which was free from the maddening drug; although, in its unadulterated state, the brandy was demoralizing enough to craze any one who ventured to indulge in it to any extent.

He had barely replaced his flask when, glancing up-stream, he discovered, to his horror, no other than Captain Warrington approaching his covert.

The officer was alone, and glancing suspiciously at every thicket he passed.

Blackbird felt sure that the captain was in search of him, although he had no grounds for thus thinking; as all, doubtless, supposed him to have returned home, and his boon companions could not have reached the ranch until after the captain had set out for the timber.

The plotter was now positive that the tables were turned, and that his life was in danger.

All was lost, should he be discovered.

The captain's mind could not be entirely free from the effects of the poison, and he would not hesitate to shoot him on sight.

For a moment everything whirled before the eyes of Blackbird, he being filled with a terrible dread; then there burst upon his mind a most hellish and dastardly resolution.

Lightning like flashed the thought that Lionel Lacrosse was down-stream, and that these two could again be brought together, when no one was near to interfere with them.

He was not sure that Captain Warrington still entertained his insane animosity against the young man. He might possibly be even now seeking him, for the purpose of apologiz-

ing; but there was a chance, even a probability when the condition of the officer's mind was considered, that he was seeking Lionel with evil intent.

Not an instant of time did Blackbird pause to deliberate. Stealthily making his way down-stream, within a line of dense thickets, he soon turned a bend in the Salado, when, to his great joy and relief, he discovered the young planter standing in an open space between the tree-trunks, facing the creek, and with a revolver in his hand, at full cock. Following Lionel's glance, the lurking Blackbird saw a large water-snake swimming down the stream, and at once interpreted his object.

He was about to shoot the snake.

No sooner was this fact apparent than, with a fiendish exultation contorting his swarthy face, the villain jerked his own weapon, and slowly drew back the hammer; the slight click of the lock being unnoticed by Lionel, who was intently watching the fast approaching snake.

Thus ready, Blackbird glanced quickly upward, ascertaining, to his relief and joy, that the topmost branches of the thicket, within which he crouched, mingled with the thick limbs and immense masses of gray moss hanging from the trees above, and would thus prevent the smoke of his pistol from being seen.

He was playing for a heavy stake; the hand of the only maiden who had ever made an impression upon his coward heart, who had infatuated and bewitched him by her beauty; and he had now, in his brandy-demoralized brain, decided upon a terrible and dastardly double crime.

His own life hung upon a thread!

Should he not pull trigger simultaneously with Lionel Lacrosse, his life must pay the forfeit should he not be able to evade pursuit.

Everything was most favorable. The wind was blowing up the stream, and he had the game in his own hands if he but played the right card at the right time.

His eyes were glaring and glassy, fixed upon Lionel; his sense of hearing strained to the utmost to catch the soft footfalls on the carpet of leaves, which would be the signal of the approach of Captain Warrington.

At last the terrible moment arrived!

Blackbird saw the captain walk slowly and cautiously up in the rear of Lionel, as if he did not wish to disturb his aim. He saw the revolver of the young planter leveled, pointed toward the surface of the Salado. Then Blackbird, with murderous glare, threw up his own weapon, aiming at the breast of the unhappy man, and, the devil favoring him, pulled trigger at the same instant as did Lionel Lacrosse.

Both reports blended in one, and close after came a heart-rending yell of terrible agony, which caused the young planter to whirl in his tracks, when his face blanched and he reeled as if stricken with palsy, his eyes bulging in horror and soul-drawn anguish at the fearful sight that met his view. For, as he turned, Captain Warrington was clutching at his breast with both hands, the blood welling from his mouth and nostrils.

A moment more and he had fallen to earth, the stamp of death on his face and an awful dread in the depths of his filmy eyes.

For an instant Lionel stood as if he had been suddenly petrified, his tongue cleaving to the roof of his mouth. Paralyzed with horror he thus stood, and then slowly staggered forward, still holding his revolver. Placing his disengaged hand upon the breast of the man who had so recently outrageously insulted him, the father of the maiden whom, though he had not met her until that day, he felt that he loved more and better than his own life, the young man paused to note the pulsations.

Then the revolver dropped from his trembling hand and he clasped his throbbing brow, while a deep groan of the most intense agony of soul burst from his lips.

Captain Warrington was dead!

CHAPTER IV.

FLEEING FROM THE AVENGER.

As that terrible cry burst from the lips of the death-stricken officer, the assassin thrust his fingers into his ears, and for a moment stood riveted to the spot from whence he had fired the dastard shot; then, as he saw his victim fall, he sunk to the earth, and crawled through the thicket toward the creek, and thence into the rushes and reeds along the bank, until at a safe distance from the scene of his cowardly double crime.

He had murdered one man, and worse than murdered another, for he had fastened his own crime upon him.

And there, by the dead man, stood Lionel Lacrosse; his arms folded across his breast, motionless as a statue, and nearly as cold. The arrows of gold from the setting sun, shot through the foliage of the bottom timber, and fell, gently and lovingly as ever, upon the awful spot.

Captain Warrington was dead—murdered! Who it was that had done the dastard deed, Lionel could not dream.

He was sure that a shot had been fired simultaneously with his own, but who had fired it, was a mystery. Lionel was crushed.

All the events of the day, that bore on the crime, now came down on him.

The captain had become, in some inexplicable way offended with him, and had struck him. Could it be that he had come, at the last, to make an apology?

It really seemed that this must have been the case; and the thought caused him double anguish.

In the sight of the world, he, an innocent man, who had never wronged a human being, or a brute, was now a murderer.

Already he could hear the outcries of those who would hunt him to his death, yet he moved not.

The shot, and the yell, had been heard at the ranch.

Perhaps, she, Winnette Warrington, had heard that last agonized cry of the father she so much loved.

"Oh, God!"

The bitter cry came, long and deep, from his anguished-parched lips, as he gazed first at the roseate sky above him, and then upon the horrible scene of murder below. Not long, however, stood the young man thus.

Rushing boisterously through the timber to the spot from which the cry of the slaughtered man had come, the half-intoxicated companions of Blackbird came within view of the gory corpse, and of him who stood near it.

Sobered at once, by the awful sight, not a word came from that noisy crowd.

Then, as each recalled the blow that had been given by the now dead captain, and the apparent enmity of the latter toward Lionel, they judged that a duel had been fought; but, upon further reflection, considering that but one shot had been fired, they all walked forward in a body, not speaking a word to each other.

All were actuated in this movement by a common object—to ascertain if the dead man held a weapon, or to inspect the ground for the revolver which, in the encounter, might have fallen from his grasp.

No weapon, however, was to be seen, but that of Lionel, which was still held in his grasp; the unfortunate young man still standing in the same position, his eyes never once wandering from the face of the dead.

Everything was quickly noticed by the observers.

There could be but one interpretation to the scene.

Lionel Lacrosse had shot Captain Warrington—had murdered, had assassinated him!

As this conviction flashed upon them, they darted forward, as one man, and grasping Lionel, snatched the revolver from his hands.

Two of the young men then held him fast, but he gave no sign of resistance, but lifted his head, and cast a quick glance around the circle—a glance, so filled with horror and despair, that it would have melted a heart of stone. Any physiognomist who saw him then, would have felt satisfied that Lionel Lacrosse was guiltless of the death of Captain Warrington.

But those who held the young ranchero were but too eager to believe the worst of him.

They asked him no questions. The proofs, indeed, were too plain, even had these men been his friends.

And now, one of their number came running from the ranch. He had left his associates, the moment they had discovered that a murder had been committed, and had gone at once to report the dread event.

So excited had he been, that he thought not of the daughter being within the dwelling; and every word, that he spoke on the veranda, was overheard by her.

Not until a shriek sounded from an open window, did the listeners without realize the indiscretion of the man who brought the appalling news. All were now dumb with amaze-

ment and horror, no less from the fact that Lionel Lacrosse was reported as an assassin, than from the tragic death of Captain Warrington.

Had not the latter publicly struck Lionel in the face, none present would have entertained the thought for a moment that the young planter could commit such a crime.

For a moment after the shriek of Winnie Warrington, all stood open-mouthed, gazing at the messenger, who, turning, bounded back to the scene of the tragedy.

Then, out upon the veranda, staggered Winnie, her face ghastly, her palms pressed upon her temples, her fingers clutched in the meshes of her golden hair; while her eyes, starting from their sockets, were glassy and unnatural.

On, over the flower-besprinkled lawn, through the twilight beneath the oaks, followed by her cousin Baldwin Brown, went poor Winnie Warrington; until, at length, she caught sight of Lionel held fast by men with whom he had never deigned to associate.

As the young girl advanced and saw the outstretched form of her father, whom she now knew to be dead, lost to her forever, she paused for an instant, and then went tottering forward; as if her limbs had lost their strength.

One long agonizing look she gave at the dead, and then at Lionel, who stood trembling at the sight of the horrified maiden whom he loved better than his own life.

His very strong and ungovernable emotion was another proof of his guilt; and Winnie shivered with aversion, giving him but one glance—a look that doubled his despair.

And yet, that look was born of her realizing his dread position; for she was still unable to believe him guilty.

Then she sprung, with a wild cry—the only sound that had left her lips since she staggered from the ranch—to the side of her murdered father, and kneeling upon the sward, sunk forward upon his breast.

The guests from the ranch had, by this time, reached them; and Baldy Brown, cried out, in a voice of anguish:

"For Heaven's sake, for Winnie's sake, and your own, Lionel Lacrosse, explain this horrible mystery! Can it be that your whole nature has been changed by the unjust treatment you received from my uncle, and that you lay in wait, and shot him like a dog?"

"I am no murderer, no assassin," said the young planter in a hoarse and unnatural voice.

"I admit that there is sufficient evidence against me to convict me of this terrible crime, but, for all that, I did not do it. Had I intended to resent the blow that was given me, I would have done so at the time it was given. However, nothing that I can say will convince you of my innocence. I shot at a water-snake in the creek. The assassin must have been concealed, and pulled trigger at the same instant, for the report was doubly loud; and, at the moment after firing, I heard a horrible outcry. I then turned and saw Captain Warrington, of whose presence I had been up to that time unconscious, fall to the earth.

"I knew that he had been wounded in some way, and, stepping forward, I found that he was dead.

"It would be natural to suppose that, had I done the deed, I would have fled at once; but I know it to be useless to advance any reasoning in my own favor. I am a victim of circumstantial evidence.

"But hear me, gentlemen: I would sooner have cut off my right arm than have harmed one hair of Captain Warrington's head!"

"That will do!" broke out one of the men who was holding Lionel. "You can tell a good story, but it is not a very plausible one. It cannot avail you. Your time has come to die. We cannot allow any cowardly assassins in our midst. What say you, neighbors?"

"Hang him!"

"String him up!"

"Run him up a limb!"

"Choke the coward with his own lariat!"

"Give ther cuss a jig on nothin'!"

Such cries now filled the air, and one of the rancheros ran for a rope.

Blackbird, in his covert, could with difficulty repress a cry of exultation.

The dastardly ruffian and murderer believed that his hellish plans would all come to a favorable ending.

As soon as the excitement had a little subsided, Baldy Brown cried out:

"Gentlemen, I beg of you to refrain from

violence. Lionel Lacrosse is a gentleman, and has never been known to do a dishonest or mean act in his life.

"I, for one, believe that he has spoken the truth, and that the real assassin is at large. Give Lionel the benefit of the doubt. Deliver him over to the authorities at San Antonio, and let him have a fair trial. I ask, I demand this!"

"We don't care a cuss what you ask or demand," was the reply of the first speaker. "Lacrosse has laid for the captain and shot him. There is no gettin' around that fact. He has got to swing, if the boys say so!"

A yell of approbation rung out on all sides, and Baldy felt that he could do nothing to prevent the lynching of his friend.

In the midst of Winnie's deep grief and anguish, the stricken girl now raised her head and glanced at Lionel with a look that changed the young man's whole bearing. Straightening his form, he exclaimed:

"Neighbors all, and you most of all, Miss Warrington, a dastardly murder has been committed, and all the evidence points toward myself as the assassin. For all that, I swear that I am innocent. You propose to hang me without judge or jury, but the time has come for me to have my say. You shall not hang me; do you hear me? The real assassin has blasted my life, and I swear that I will live to track him down, if it takes years to do so!"

Before the listeners fully understood the gist of the young man's words, Lionel Lacrosse, by a Herculean effort, wrenched himself free, snatched his revolver from the ranchero who had taken it from him, caught up another that lay near, and cocking both weapons, yelled, as he backed toward a thicket near them:

"Throw up your hands, all of you! I am no murderer, but a desperate man whom you would murder. Farewell, Baldy Brown! Take care of Winnie Warrington. When next you see Lionel Lacrosse, there shall be no stain, or suspicion of such, upon his name!"

With these words the young ranchero vanished; those who had been so eager to lynch him being dumfounded at the sudden change in his manner and actions.

And now Bird Blackwell cowered, trembling with a terrible dread and abject terror, as Lionel rushed past his hiding-place, and up the Salado.

In five minutes more the young planter was galloping like a leaf before the gale, up the stream, and toward his home, knowing well that he would be pursued by maddened men, insanely eager for his blood.

And he was right. He had not proceeded twenty paces after disappearing from view, when the rancheros, with yells of rage, rushed toward the ranch for their horses, sprung upon them, and sped on in pursuit of young Lacrosse, resolved to capture and hang him to the first tree they afterward should reach.

CHAPTER V.

THE APACHE RAID.

ALTHOUGH Major Lacrosse, the father of Lionel, had been pressed by Baldwin Brown to attend the shooting-match, he complained of not feeling very well, and decided to remain at home; but, had he known the terrible and fatal consequences to himself originating from this decision, he would have mounted his fastest horse, and galloped madly after his son.

It cannot be disputed that there are times when one should, to avoid dangers, know of the future, and this was a time when Lawrence Lacrosse should have been warned of the approach of those who knew no mercy.

Lionel halted his horse at the edge of the timber at the bend, turned in his saddle, and waved his sombrero in adieu to his father. The latter returned the salute, with every show of pleasure in his face.

The face of the major beamed with happy content and satisfaction, as he sat slowly puffing at his pipe.

Everything was prosperous with the old gentleman. A contented, happy old age seemed insured to him.

In his thin, but still handsome face, his bright and piercing eyes still showed much of the fire and dash that had won him rank and distinction in the war with Mexico.

As he sat thus on the vine-covered veranda, clothed in a neat suit of black, at times glancing over the slow-waving field of rustling corn, with its background of timber, he presented, with his surroundings, a goodly picture

to look upon; for it represented a quiet comfort, plenty, and a happy old age, framed in Nature's brightest colors, which almost screened from view all signs of the handiwork of man.

A good specimen of the old-time Southern gentleman was Major Lawrence Lacrosse, and the scene around him was most truly Southern in all its characteristics.

Here and there were little negroes, basking in the sun, half naked, or chasing each other in their thoughtless glee, all as happy as the day was long.

The old cook, Aunt Huld, issuing her mandates in a peremptory manner, with her arms akimbo and her many-colored kerchief upon her head, loomed high above her assistants in the kitchen, now busy preparing dinner.

The negro men, some repairing corrals, some mending tools and horse equipments, others hoeing corn, all taken together, made up a scene that was calculated to produce the content that was visible in the face of the proprietor.

And the old man sat thus, gradually becoming listless from continuous smoking, his face at times, being turned down the creek, as though he greatly missed and longed for the presence of his son.

Then, after a while, Aunt Huld seized the dinner-horn—a veritable horn from the head of a four-year-old steer, and which, in the olden time, had been used as a bugle by the Texas Rangers—and blew a rousing blast; her fat cheeks swelling out nearly to bursting, in her effort to reach the ears of the field-hands. This greatly amused the picaninies, who rolled on the ground in their mirth, but scampered rapidly away as the queen of the kitchen waddled toward them in her indignation, crying out:

"Dog-gone yer no 'count small trash! Yer better hush, er yer'll get clean bones fur ter gnaw, fer Aunt Huld ain't gwine ter 'low no sars 'roun' hyer."

The dinner over, then followed another smoke for the old major, who next proceeded to take a siesta in his hammock, which was stretched in the cool passage.

It was near sunset when the old gentleman awoke, little dreaming that his loved son was, at this very moment, clutched and held by a mob of half-drunken rancheros, who proposed to hang him like a dog for a crime he had not committed.

But little would it matter to the major in what condition his son was when that news reached Lacrosse Ranch, and, as if "coming events were casting their shadows before," the old man, as he resumed his pipe and chair, seemed, in comparison to his previous appearance before his nap, to be greatly depressed. His eyes were now fixed absently upon the trunk of a huge oak, opposite his position, in a dreamy way, his disengaged hand being pressed upon his brow.

Why is it, one may well ask, that a dozen men with their families, may settle on the same stream on the border, all within the distance of a day's ride, and eleven of them may prosper in their new homes, while the twelfth sees his darlings mutilated and scalped before his eyes, as he himself is bound helpless to a tree within the beat of his blazing home, and in turn tortured by the war-painted fiends, who leave on their trail the smoking ruins of desolated homes, and corpses mutilated beyond recognition?

Thus it is, gentle reader, and we may well wonder at the injustice of these tragic happenings.

But, to our tale.

The songs of the negroes at their work went on, and were in consonance with the evening air, and Major Lacrosse still puffed listlessly at his pipe, glancing down the Salado more frequently, now that he looked for the speedy return of Lionel.

And thus we leave him, and inspect the creek bottom to the northwest, for the danger, in regard to which we have hinted most plainly, lurks in that direction.

A quarter of an hour, and the lower disk of the sun would seem to rest upon the western horizon; when, a rifle-shot from the upper corral, but within the shades of the timber, two score of paint-daubed Apaches, mounted upon their half-wild steeds, advanced in single order along a winding cattle-trail, and down the stream toward Lacrosse Ranch.

Their black, bloodthirsty eyes glittered sweeping and suspicious glances on every side, seeming to pierce each dense thicket in search of lurking foe; their left hands clutched ready

their bows and arrows, their right holding firmly to the jaw straps of their steeds.

Naked from their waists up, their broad breasts, daubed with *totems* and stripes of war, their limbs covered with beaded buckskin leggings, their feet with moccasins of the same—thus they appeared, their long hair hanging wild to the backs of their animals, amid the meshes of which were tiny ornaments of silver.

Thus on they came, a hideous horde, with sinews of steel.

On, silently and stealthily, bent forward in their saddles, as if striving to pierce the woods in advance, listening for sounds that denoted the presence of man; all murder-bent, eager, insanely eager for blood.

The trails which they followed, the mark of the white man's ax, and a score of other signs, all plain to their practiced eyes, proved them near to a ranch, the corrals of which they had already discovered from a bend above.

At length, a snake-like hiss proceeds from the lips of the leader, and the signal is passed from one to another. Then all come to a halt, except him from whom the sound first came.

He wears three feathers of the black eagle in his beaded fillet, and he urges his steed on alone. Soon, however, he returns, his hideous features contorted with murderous exultation; as, with a significant gesture, he reveals the intelligence he has gained. He then gives his orders.

A half-dozen braves, keeping close to the stream, proceed quickly down toward the field of corn, the main body walking their horses but a short distance; getting opposite the ranch, which is now in plain view.

As they peer through the foliage, they discover the old major, who placidly puffs his pipe; dreaming of no possible discomfort, much less of torture and death.

But a short space of time elapses when, from down the creek, comes a peculiar bird-like cry, which is answered by him of the eagle plumes. Then, from the same lips, rings, in blood-curdling tone, the wild war-whoop of the Apache, the signal for hissing quirts; then the snorting steeds, bearing their wild riders, bound free from the bushes, an appalling line that would chill the blood of the bravest at first sight toward the ranch. An echo to the war-whoop then burst forth from down the stream, mingled with piercing cries of horror from the negroes in the cornfield, as the red fiends dash upon them, filling their bodies, as they fly, with arrows.

Major Lacrosse, as the terrific war-whoop cut the air, and the horrible line of painted Apaches sprung on their wild-eyed steeds from the undergrowth toward him, bounded to his feet, for the moment paralyzed; so unexpected, so undreamed of was the sight, that he could not at first believe his senses.

Not long, however, remained he thus; for the war-spirit of the olden time blazed from his eyes; and, although he at once realized that he was doomed, he resolved to sell his life dearly. He ran into the dwelling, returning instantly with a Colt's revolving carbine, and a brace of six-shooters of the same make, army size.

The Indians were galloping toward the ranch at terrific speed, already having passed half the distance between the house and the timber, when the major, laying the brace of revolvers upon the chair beside him, straightened himself in a defiant manner, bringing the carbine to his shoulder, and presenting a sight so unexpected to the Indians, and so recklessly daring, that even they, excited and murderously mad as they were, shot out ejaculations of wonder and respect; refraining from further whoops, in order that they might not jeopardize themselves by alarming the rancheros below.

Their admiration, however, was soon turned to frantic fury, for the major fired, in rapid succession, the five deadly slugs from his carbine.

Nothing, brute or human, could survive wounds received from those conical Minie balls. Each tore its way through a vital part; and, as the old man was a dead-shot, down went a brave with a horrible death-yell at each sounding report.

Dropping the carbine as quickly as it was emptied, the old soldier grasped a revolver in each hand, and manipulating hammers and triggers dexterously, shot dead, or placed *hors du combat*, three more of his red enemies, before the Apaches in a thundering charge lashed

their animals in a mad mingled mob upon the veranda, knocking down and trampling the brave old man upon the floor of his home!

On, through the wide passage, dashed the blood-craving horde. On, with a burling rain of deadly arrows preceding them; shooting the terror-stricken negroes to the earth, and trampling their bodies under the hoofs of their frenzied horses.

Some sprung from their steeds and scalped and horribly mutilated the bodies of the poor slaves, none of whom escaped alive. Aunt Huldry was pierced with steel-pointed shafts, while on bended knees on her kitchen floor, praying most fervently, crying out from her terrified soul:

"Oh, Lordy! Oh, Jesus, Mars' Lord, save ole Huldry from de red debbils!"

The major, now senseless, was secured to the trunk of the large oak—the very spot upon which his eyes had been bent fixedly in deep study but a few minutes before—his coat, vest and shirt were torn from him by furious hands. Arrow points were then pressed into his flesh, the intensity of the torture causing his senses to return.

He realized at once that he was doomed to a terrible death, and glared at his fiendish torturers in defiance and derision, assumed and maintained by a superhuman effort of will, to hasten the bitter end, and free him from his most fearful agony.

This had the desired effect, for the intended protracted torture, in revenge for his having slain so many of their number, was lost sight of, as the furious painted and blood-smearred demons sprung upon him, dug out his eyes, and slashed his arms and body, until, his head sinking forward proved that he was beyond the reach of further suffering.

Then his scalp was torn from his head, leaving both it and his body a mass of gore-dripping flesh; the sightless eyes hanging by the unsevered nerves some inches from their sockets—a sight that was calculated to sicken one to the very soul, and to turn an Indian Peace Commissioner into a merciless scalper of everything in human shape that wore a red skin.

By this time all desirable plunder had been taken from the dwelling and packed upon horses, which they found in one of the corrals; the savages changing their saddles and jawstraps to the best animals they could select, and allowing their own much inferior beasts to stampede on the plain.

The dead were also bound on fresh horses, as were also the wounded; then the cabins and ranch were fired, and the blood-drunk, frenzied horde of Apache fiends sped away over the plain like dry leaves before a "norther," in the direction of the Rio Guadalupe, thence to scatter the same devastation and death that they had left behind.

CHAPTER VI.

SINGLE-EYE, THE SCOUT.

THERE were several of the more respectable and wealthy rancheros, of the same stamp as William Brown, who took no part in the attempt to hold Lionel Lacrosse captive, although they were not convinced of his innocence.

Just the opposite, indeed. From the evidence before them, they believed that Captain Warrington had met his death at the hands of the young ranchero; but at the same time they felt sure that there had been a second attack on the part of the captain, and that Lionel, taken unawares, had on the impulse of the moment fired the fatal shot.

Knowing the young man from his childhood up, they were confident that the killing had not been premeditated. They were, therefore, in favor of a thorough investigation, and would, without doubt, have interfered with the lynchers, had the latter proceeded to extremities.

When Lionel escaped they were not exactly pleased, but at the same time they were somewhat relieved.

They had, at all events, avoided a collision with the dissipated crowd, and they had no doubt that the young planter would evade a second capture.

Baldy Brown, however, was nearly frantic. He feared that Lionel would be overtaken and hanged, and he would have mounted his horse and galloped to the assistance of his friend had it not been for the terrible condition of his cousin Winnie, who had relapsed into a half-insane, half-comatose state.

All present were so affected by the astounding and undreamed-of tragedy, and the circum-

stances connected with it, that for a time they were incapable of judgment or action, the occurrences that have been recorded having occupied but a brief space of time.

It was not five minutes after the dissolute companions of Blackbird had disappeared in the bottom timber when up to the ranch of the Browns, from the prairie that stretched toward the Guadalupe, rode a man of somewhat singular appearance, upon a horse that was almost as peculiar as himself.

He was small in stature and thin in flesh; his face was tanned by sun and camp-smoke, besides being much wrinkled. His hair was long and tangled, and sprinkled with gray.

He was attired in a rough-made, slouchy buckskin suit, much worn and soiled.

His entire outfit and arms were in perfect keeping with his general appearance, a Colt's five-chambered revolving carbine hanging at his saddle-horn, in close proximity with a long rawhide lasso.

His horse was thin and lank and ancient in appearance.

But the most noticeable peculiarity in both horse and man was that each had but one eye.

The pair would have attracted notice even in a frontier town, where people of all nationalities and every imaginable character and costume are to be met.

Their appearance was most comical; but there was an expression in the eye of the old man that would warn a stranger against laughing at him. Indeed, no one who knew him would ever think of doing so, for he was universally known and respected in Southern and Western Texas.

He was "Single Eye," a noted scout and ranger.

As the horse came up to the central portion of the veranda his rider squirted a stream of tobacco-juice far out toward the creek. Then, with something of surprise manifested in his face, he swept the house and its surroundings with his solitary optic, speaking at the same time to his horse, as was his custom.

"Dang my cats, Skip-lively! hit 'pears ter be kinder lonesome 'bout ther ranch, though it air chuck full o' 'sign.' Fact air, I sh'd s'pose they'd hed a slam up fandang'. They hain't broke up house-keepin', I don't reckon, fer thar's tricks an' traps 'nough in thar fer a rig'ment o' humans."

Single-Eye was about to dismount and enter the house, when his attention was attracted by his horse.

The old scout depended much upon his animal in his frontier roamings, the beast, to make up for the loss of its eye, being gifted with an acute sense of hearing, swinging its head violently when attracted by any sound on its blind side.

"Thank 'e, Skip!" said Single Eye, much relieved, as he perceived a woman coming up rapidly from the timber. "Ef yer hesn't gut but one peeper, yer hes gut ther keenest pa'r o' years thet ever was hitched onter a four-legged critter."

"Thar's a caliker-kivered female 'oman what I doesn't keer ter palaver with, but I reckon I'll hev ter listen ter her warblin' a minit. Don't git narvous, Skip; we'll glide along ter fresh grass in a few shakes of a alligator's latter end."

"How'd'y, Marm Brown! See'd yer warn't ter hum, an' war jist 'bout ter skute up creek ter Lacrosse Ranch."

"I am glad to see you, Single-Eye," returned the lady, who seemed to be laboring under some great excitement; "very glad to see you; for a terrible thing has happened, and we are all nearly crazy."

"My brother, Captain Warrington, who recently came to visit us, lies dead in the timber. He has been murdered, and all the evidence points to Lionel Lacrosse as the man who shot him; though I, for one, am very unwilling to believe it."

"He did not try to escape, until some of the Guadalupe boys were about to hang him. Then he broke from them, and mounting his horse, galloped up the stream toward his home, the young men from the river riding in pursuit of him."

"Dang my great-gran'mother's blackest Thomas-cat!" exclaimed the scout in a rage. "Hit's a double-bar'led, bald-headed, howlin' lie! Lionel ain't thet sort o' stock."

"He's gut a dang'd sight more man in his little toe than thar bees in ther hull crowd that's arter him!"

"If they touches him, I'll make blue pill

pouches outen every one o' the'r dang'd stom-icks. I'll do hit, so help me!

"So 'long, Marm Brown; I'm off on ther 'vestergate biz, like a streak o' greased lightnin'."

No sooner had Mrs. Brown revealed the news of the tragedy, and the name of the supposed murderer, than the optic of Single-Eye blazed with fury.

As he ceased speaking he dashed into the bottom timber in such haste, and with such unusual use of spur and twitch of rein, as to greatly amaze and discompose Skip-lively.

In a few moments the old scout had drawn rein within ten feet of the murdered man.

Single-Eye for an instant sat his horse, gazing at the scene and its surroundings. He then beckoned for Baldwin Brown to approach, as he threw himself from the saddle, and extended his hand.

William Brown himself also came forward, and greeted the old scout.

In a little time Baldy had explained everything.

"Whar war Lionel a-standin'?" asked Single-Eye.

The young man pointed out the spot where Lionel asserted that he had stood, when he was startled by the cry of Captain Warrington, that came close upon the discharge of his pistol.

"An' Lionel said he war a-shootin' et a snake in ther crick?" questioned Single-Eye.

"Yes; that was what he asserted," said Baldwin.

The scout twitched at his belt nervously, and then stepped carefully forward to the point where Lionel had stood when he had fired at the snake.

The ground was soft and moist, and had not been trampled, except near the corpse.

Single-Eye examined the sward with great care.

All present who were not supporting and endeavoring to console Winnie Warrington, watched the old scout eagerly, for they knew his great skill in reading "sign."

Soon he returned, and dropping upon his knees, inspected the ground at and near the feet of the corpse; he then unbuttoned the captain's vest, and examined the wound.

During all this time Blackbird remained in the dense thicket, where he had first ensconced himself.

He dared not leave it, from fear of being observed, and thus exciting suspicion against him.

When the old scout appeared upon the scene, Blackbird trembled, for he feared Single-Eye.

He knew him to be a friend and great admirer of the young planter, and also that he was gifted with almost miraculous detective powers.

When the dastardly assassin saw Single-Eye examining the ground, his teeth chattered with abject terror. Still he dared not attempt to escape, as he knew not who might be in the bottom; and nothing less than certain death threatened, if the scout should see him on the run.

Single-Eye arose from the ground, and gave a grunt of satisfaction. Then, without a word of explanation, he walked toward the thicket, directly west from the corpse.

Those who watched the old scout disappear in the bushes soon heard another grunt; then all was silent.

The hair on Blackbird's head seemed like squirming serpents; and well it might, for the next moment he was appalled at the sight of Single Eye crawling along his trail, toward the dense thicket.

For a moment the wretch crouched on his hands and knees, unable even to move for the next few minutes.

When he did at last arise, he staggered against a bush, causing a rustling of branches and leaves, and the next instant he was clutched, as in a vise, by the scout.

Fear and dread of an ignominious fate, however, gave the villain the strength of half a dozen men. By a superhuman effort, as both struggled and fell to the earth, he wrenched himself free, and dashed madly over the bank into the Salado.

"Dang my gran'mother's bestest black cat's hind paw!"

This peculiar exclamation came from the lips of Single-Eye, as he held in his hand a revolver that he had jerked from the scabbard of Blackbird, upon first clutching him.

Gazing into the cylinder, the old scout saw

that one load was wanting. He therefore walked out to meet Baldy and a number of rancheros, who, having heard the noise of the struggle, were now coming up.

"Feller-pards," he said, with something of triumph in his voice; "I tole Marm Brown that Lionel didn't shoot ther capt'in, an' I know'd hit dead sure an' sartin afore I run in on yer hyer."

"Yer hes see'd me 'zaminin' ther 'sign,' an' now I tells yer what I hes foun' out."

"Lionel stud out thar fer some periods, a-facin' ther crick; like es not waitin' fer ther snake ter swim inter plain shootin' locate. Thar's whar he stud, an' sunk his huffs inter ther sod. Hit shows plain; an' right hyer, whar ther capt'in war shot, yer kin see he war abint Lionel, a-facin' jest est Lionel war."

"When he war shot, he kinder leaned back'ard, an' stepped back'ard, an' fell back'ard when his strength left him; all o' which air proved by ther deep heel-marks, an' not much show o' toe-marks."

"Ef he'd 'a' bin shot by Lionel, standin' es ther sign shows, hit 'ud 'a' bin plum in ther breast. But, ef yer'll 'zamine, yer'll see ther ball struck ther capt'in in ther right side, an' went clean through his bestest 'natemy."

"Thet shows thet war shot from ther thicket yunder an' thar I 'cordin'ly went fer 'sign,' which war 'bout plain enough."

"I foun' this hyer"—showing a brandy-flask—"an' perceedin' on ther trail, I jumped ther condemned cuss what hes done ther cowardly biz—done hit a-purpus ter git Lionel Lacrosse strung up a limb!"

"He gut 'way from me, but, by ther Eternal, I'll hev him yet, er bu'st my brain-box!"

"I jarked his six-shooter from him, an' now I calls on yer all ter gaze at ther chambers. Yer'll see thar's one charge shot off, an' thet hit hain't bin long since ther trigger war pulled, es ther show o' burnt powder air plain on ther chamber."

"Feller-pards, Capt'in Warrin'ton hev bin 'sassernated in sich a cowardly way thet hit 'ud make a 'Pache 'shamed ter count hit in his death-song. I, ole Single-Eye, assevirates this, an' I'll take a double-bar'led afferdavy thet ther man what lays thar dead, an' kivered w' bleed, war shot by Bird Blackwell!"

A confused murmur of surprise and amazement, mingled with relief, burst from those who were collected around, while Winnie Warrington, raising her clasped hands over her head, her long masses of golden hair hanging to her waist, and the tears streaming from her eyes, called out, for the first time:

"Father in heaven, I thank Thee! There is this one relief to my tortured brain, in the midst of all my fearful grief and despair."

"Thou hast brought the proof, through Single-Eye, that one whom all except myself believed to be an assassin, the slayer of my loved father, is innocent of the fearful deed."

"Oh, God, give me the strength to bear the great and crushing weight of anguish Thou hast seen fit to lay upon me, and guard and protect him who is being pursued to the death for another's crime!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE FLIGHT.

As has been mentioned, Lionel Lacrosse, from the time that he first glanced into the limpid blue eyes of Winnie Warrington, and listened to her silvery voice, had seen everything in life through a new medium.

A new existence seemed opened to him as he walked with the fair girl beneath the oaks.

Never, in his wildest dreams or imaginings, had he thought it possible for human being to be blessed by such happiness as he felt when by the side of Winnie, who, by her sprightly manner and conversation, caused him to plunge into an intimacy which made him feel as though he had known her for years.

And Winnie had appeared to be no less favorably impressed than himself.

Those were blissful moments that preceded the time when, at dinner, Captain Warrington manifested such open displeasure, finally withdrawing from the table with his daughter, without a word of excuse—in fact, ignoring his presence altogether.

The young man had very naturally felt hurt by this uncalled-for conduct; and when the sports were over, and he saw Captain Warrington enter the bottom timber, although Lionel had resolved to hold himself aloof from Winnie until such time as her father had been informed of his position and character, yet his

resolution melted away as soon as his gaze again rested upon the beautiful girl.

Once again, therefore, he joined her, basking in her smiles, and filled with rapture at the mere sound of her voice.

Soon both, as they rambled slowly over the park, forgot all else but themselves.

It was then that Captain Warrington rushed, insanely furious, toward them, and Lionel Lacrosse was struck publicly in the face by the father of the maiden who had taken his heart by storm.

By a superhuman effort, the young man had controlled himself, and refrained from resenting the humiliating insult, on account of her upon whom the stroke had fallen the heaviest, and who had been carried fainting into the house.

The suffering of Lionel, as he entered the timber, and impatiently wandered beneath the shades, waiting for some intelligence from Winnie, and seeking in vain for the slightest excuse for the conduct of the captain, may be imagined.

Thus tortured in mind, a black cloud having suddenly and unexpectedly fallen upon, and banished his newly-born happiness, he strolled sadly along.

But the cloud was as nothing to the hopeless despair, the mind torture, that bordered upon insanity, which was to enshroud him, and banish him from all that he held dear on earth, besides branding him, innocent though he was, as a cowardly assassin.

Feeling as he did, it is beyond human comprehension to describe the avalanche of horror that paralyzed his brain when, on turning round, after firing his revolver at the snake, he saw Captain Warrington fall to the ground. For he saw that no other human being was in sight, and felt that he was being made the victim of a hellish plot.

His practiced ear told him that another weapon had been discharged at the same instant as his own: but such was the bewildered condition of his mind, that he could not, for the life of him, decide from what direction the report had proceeded.

His despair, on discovering that the captain was dead, and that he was in danger of being taken and lynched as his murderer, appalled Lionel; but no thought of flight entered his mind. A consciousness of innocence decided him to brave the danger that he realized now threatened him.

The circumstantial evidence which must be conclusive to all, the enmity that had been shown by the captain, all pointed toward a longing for revenge on his part, and would show sufficient motive for the murder. Not for a moment did Lionel suppose that any one harbored ill-feeling toward himself, except it might be the petty jealousy occasioned by his proved superiority in the sports of the day, and upon such like previous occasions.

Never was man more wronged in an hour's time, or plunged deeper into the gloom of despair so conclusive was the evidence against him, than was Lionel Lacrosse.

Having escaped from his would-be lynchers, the young planter galloped on toward the home that would be his home no more until the dread mystery was explained, and the assassin hunted down.

And now, to crush him still more, if it were possible, his loved father was brought to mind.

The poor old man, who was never happy except when his son was by his side, what would he do now?

How could his father spare—how would he be affected by all this?

Lionel knew that this fondest of parents would be crushed to the earth by this terrible event, this undreamed-of and overwhelming sorrow, that would banish his boy from his side, branded as a murderer.

As the anguished young man thought of this, a thousand and one dread thoughts rushed through his already overtaxed brain.

Could it be possible that more of trouble and agony were to be heaped upon his already crushed heart and racked soul? Could it be that he was to be plunged deeper into the depths, crowding him off the brink of reason into the abyss of desperation?

Lionel could not believe this. Onward he dashed, still urging his horse to greater speed, in a short time bursting from the timber of a bend of the creek into the "open" that commanded a view of Lacrosse Ranch. As his steed sprung free of the undergrowth, Lionel dropped the reins from his trembling hands,

which were thrown upward and clasped tightly together, while from his quivering lips burst the words:

"Oh, my God! Hast Thou forsaken me?"

Only this. Then the blanched face of the young planter was again turned toward his home, his eyes fixed with horrible suspicion—horrible apprehension. For ahead the black smoke rolled upward in volumes from huge tongues of snapping, roaring flames!

Lacrosse Ranch was burned to the ground!

Nothing but the blazing logs of the flooring now remained.

Lionel's eyes were fixed upon the flames in a look that seemed to pierce the fire and gaze into its depths; but suddenly, as his horse reached an oak opposite the scene of the conflagration, the animal gave a snort of terror and sprung quickly aside, almost unseating his rider.

Only one look gave Lionel. Then with a cry of horror unspeakable, he sprung to the earth.

For a moment the young ranchero stood as if stricken with death, gazing at the trunk of the oak.

And well he might; for there was a sight to cause the blood to congeal in one's veins.

There, his flesh gashed and his body covered with gore, and secured to a tree, was a man, the head and shoulders bent forward, the head scalped, the eyes hanging from their sockets!

One look Lionel gave toward the mutilated victim of savage butchery; then he fell upon his hands and knees, crawling toward the fearful-looking sight.

As he reached a position near the corpse, he bent to the earth and looked up at the face of the blood-stained dead. Then he sunk, with a heart-broken groan of anguish, to the ground, for all that was left of his loved father—the tortured, mutilated body secured to the tree—was before him!

Major Lawrence Lacrosse was no more!

Lacrosse Ranch was burned to the ground, and the last of the Lacrosse name, branded as an outlaw, must fly or meet an ignominious death.

Could a man have all these horrors hurled at once upon him and live? Could a man thus suffer and retain his reason?

It did seem impossible.

There was nothing for Lionel to live for now.

Thus he thought, but his mind soon changed.

Henceforth he would be an avenger, and a merciless one.

All the dread happenings that had paralyzed him, for the time, with horror should not keep him back from his revenge.

The assassin of Captain Warrington should be caught and made to pay the penalty of his crime.

The fiendish red torturers who had murdered and mutilated his revered father and given his home to the flames, should die, every one of them.

He would dedicate his life, from this out, to this work of vengeance.

Rising to his feet and clinching his hands, he raised them over the gory head of his murdered father, and raising his eyes reverently upward, made a solemn oath never to entertain rest or relief or comfort until he had avenged the horrible doings of this day.

As his parched lips muttered this oath, loud yells from down the Salado reached his ears.

Lionel well knew what they meant—death, an ignominious death by the rope, for himself.

He sprung to his feet, shook his clinched fist toward the approaching horsemen, who saw him not, then stepping forward, while the tears of anguish rolled down his cheeks, he raised the gory head of his dead father upward, pressing his lips to the cold cheek.

He noticed then that the corpse was as yet not much stiffened. From this fact he was convinced that the red fiends who had acted such a prominent part in crushing him still deeper into desperation and despair, could not have had time since doing their hellish work to travel any very great distance.

Convinced of this, and knowing that those who were clamoring for his blood were close at hand, Lionel Lacrosse, the sworn avenger, remounted and dashed westward, passing as he went the mangled and scalped bodies of several of his faithful slaves.

Out on the plain he galloped, and up the Salado, leaving his smoldering home, his father's mutilated corpse, and the angelic maiden

whom he loved more than his own life, far behind.

And at each bound of his horse Lionel Lacrosse became more dangerously desperate, more madly eager for revenge, more determined to battle against the sea of horrors, amid the pitiless and surging waves of which he had been thrown and left to struggle alone.

Thus, on leaving all of his life and love and hope behind him, dashing toward the haunts of savages, who, although they had tortured his gray-haired sire to death, could not be more fiendish than the one who had caused him, an innocent man, to go out with the brand of Cain upon him.

CHAPTER VIII.

FLIGHT OF THE BLACKBIRD.

THE western sky was aglow, as if the distant prairie was one lurid sheet of flame, causing grotesque shadows within the timber. The thickets were dark and somber, while overhead the evening breeze sighed through the slowly waving branches, and swayed the long festoons of Spanish moss that, pall like, overhung the spot where lay the murdered man.

Weird and strange was the scene; the central and most noticeable figure forming a tableau never to be forgotten.

Winnie Warrington was now standing by the head of the corpse, her hands clasped upon her breast, as she looked down upon the still face of the dead.

At the feet of the murdered captain, stood Single Eye, his gaze fixed upon the bereaved maiden.

Skip lively, by his masters' side, also seemed to be studying the scene with deep interest.

All were, for the time, silent and immovable as statues.

"Baldy," said the old scout at length, as he stepped to the young man's side; "this hyer thing hes gone on long 'nough. Make ther weemin take ther leetle gal hum; an' you an' your dad, an' ther t'others carry ther capt'in ter ther ranch."

"Yer better sen' somebuddy to San Antone wi' ther news ter his sojer boys, what'll want ter shoot over him when he's planted."

"I'm on ther skute up crick, ter keep ther scum what runs wi' Blackbird from kerralin' Lionel; though I reckon he's peart enough ter keep his hoss's hinders outen thar sight. Do es I tells yer, an' I'll skip this-a-away ag'in, an' see how things ruffle wi' ther leetle gal. So long!"

With these words Single Eye stepped toward Winnie Warrington, and removing his old sombrero, said with respect:

"Leetle Winnie, Single Eye wants yer ter skute towards ther ranch, an' take a lay-down. Ther ole man knows thar ain't no 'Nited States lingo what kin be shoved up ter relieve yer sorrow. Howsomever, we all knows that we hes gut ter slip our breeth, an' glide on ther whiz ter kingdom come, sooner er later; an' hit's some conseration ter b'lieve thet our troubles comes to an eend some time."

"Mebbe so hit's jist 'bout es well thet yer dad hes passed his chips on ther jump; fer he mought ha' gut tuck, an' scarified, an' scalped by ther cantankerous red heathen, up-country. Thet doesn't take the cuss off though, by a jug-full; an' I hev sworn a affdavy thet Blackbird shill hev a high ole time savin' hisself in futur', fer I'm a goin' fer him on ther jump."

"But, fust off, I'm on ther glide ter save Lionel from ther pesky skunks thet orter be choked off the'r selves."

"He sha'n't be hurted, while I an' Skip' kin keep a eye apiece on ther galoots. Hit war a put-up job ter git Lionel offen some trail, an' run him from ther Salado, er up a limb. But he ain't outen thar way till yit."

"Keep up yer sperrits, leetle gal; an' say a pray now an' then, not forgittin' ole Single Eye when yer does. I'm levantin' up creek now, ter save Lionel. So long!"

The hint of the old scout, in regard to the probable motive of Blackbird in shooting her father, greatly impressed Winnie. She recalled the fact, that, upon being introduced to Lionel, they, with Baldwin Brown, had left Bird Blackwell abruptly, and that he seemed to be in a rage in consequence; but she had not, at the time, deemed it worthy of consideration.

She had met Single Eye often, as he had acted as guide for the regiment to which her father belonged; and his words served to distract her mind somewhat from her great grief.

As the old scout sprung upon his horse, the

rancheros waving their hats to him, he had the satisfaction of seeing Winnie being led away by the women.

As he was about to dash up creek, Baldy sprung to his bridle, exclaiming:

"What about Blackbird? Shall we strike out for his father's ranch on the Guadalupe?"

"Ya-as; soon es yer hes tuck ther capt'in inter ther cabin, some on yer gallop thet-a-way, an' kerral ther cuss ef yer kin. But I opines he'll skip toward ole Mex'."

"Howsomever, we'll git him sooner er later. He'll mos' likely go fer ther ole man's 'rocks' afore levantin', an' yer mays kupe him in. I'd glide arter him, ef Lionel warn't in a bad fix. So long, pard Baldy!"

"All right, old pard," was the reply; "we'll do our best. But save Lionel at all hazards."

Off through the now darkened timber, out into the open ground, and then on up the border of the bottom toward Lacrosse Ranch, dashed Single Eye.

Upon reaching the dwelling of the Browns, Winnie Warrington, free from the influence of the weird scene in the bottom timber, relapsed into uncontrollable grief. Her aunt, and the few female guests who volunteered to remain over night, did all in their power to comfort the poor girl, and were at last relieved when she fell into a deep sleep.

Baldy and his father, with the help of others removed the body of the captain to one of the negro cabins, where the servant of the murdered officer prepared it for burial.

This done, the horses were equipped, and Baldy led half a dozen rancheros in hot haste toward the Blackwell Ranch, on the Guadalupe.

When Blackbird, by a desperate struggle, born of most terrible dread of the fate that he knew awaited him, escaped from Single Eye, he bounded through the tall reeds, and waded the Salado, which, at that point, was quite narrow and shallow.

Upon entering the dense rushes, the assassin paused for a moment and listened intently for sounds from the opposite side. Clutching his bowie and remaining revolver, he determined to resist capture to the death.

His swarthy face was now as ghastly pale as the nature of his skin would allow, and his black eyes glared with the fire and fury of a wild beast at bay.

Full well he knew his jeopardy. Full well he knew that the scout had decided that he was the murderer.

He cursed himself for an idiot, for he discovered that the flask of drugged brandy had slipped from his pocket and was gone. He knew that he must have lost it in the very thicket from which he had fired the fatal shot. And now, if it was found by Single Eye, it would be preserved as evidence against him.

Not only this, but the old scout had snatched from his belt the very revolver with which he had fired at Captain Warrington.

The empty chamber, and the evidence of its recent discharge, would be overwhelming proof against him.

He had observed, too, the scout examining the spot where Lionel had stood, and the sword near the dead man.

No doubt so skillful a prairie man could at once determine the exact position of the captain when he was shot; indeed the assassin felt assured that the soft sword would show the heel-marks plainly, and betray the exact position of the officer at the time. Once that was decided, an examination of the wound would plainly show from whence the ball had been fired.

All this he knew had been detected and reasoned out by Single Eye; and this reasoning was, that had led him to his covert in the thicket.

Blackbird had credited himself with having contrived a cunning plan to ruin his rival and bring him to a shameful death, while all the time, like a fool, he was fixing a lariat to be used in hanging himself.

One thing was certain. He had lost all in his attempt to ruin Lionel, for whom he had long entertained an intense hatred, which had become so furious when he saw, as he thought, that Winnie Warrington had fallen in love with his enemy at first sight, that, maddened by the brandy he had drank, he had left himself open to detection at every step.

He was now amazed at his own desperate act, and was filled with wonder to think that he had really shot a man who had never, in the slightest way wronged him, and he, too,

the father of the girl with whom he was so desperately in love. Blackbird could hardly bring himself to realize it.

But he knew that he had outlawed himself; that his home could shelter him no longer, and that he must fly to parts unknown—fly for his life.

He knew that he would be hunted like a dog; the presence of Single-Eye, and the friendship of the latter for Lionel, insuring this.

It would be almost impossible for them to trace him in the timber until the following day. They would naturally suppose that he would at once seek his father's ranch on the Guadalupe; consequently his only hope was to reach home ahead of his pursuers, and secure funds with which to escape and to support him in the future.

If he waited until daylight, he was lost.

There would then be no chance to secure money; for his father, who had grown cold toward him of late, would make sure that he had no opportunity to rob him.

These thoughts rushed through Blackbird's mind in a moment while he crouched in the river reeds; then he rushed down the creek again, waded across the stream, and hastened to the thicket where he had secreted his horse. Mounting the animal, he spurred for dear life down the Salado for a mile, and then out from the timber upon the open plain.

Over this he sped, like a leaf before the gale, toward the Guadalupe, while a mile to the west, soon after, and pointing directly for the last named stream, galloped Baldy and his associates from Brown's Ranch, riding parallel with the trail of the man they were hunting; both the latter and themselves heading for the same point, the Blackwell ranch on the Rio Guadalupe.

In two hours' time, Baldy Brown and the rancheros had surrounded the home of Blackbird; leaving their horses and walking toward the dwelling simultaneously at a given signal, for the purpose of searching the house.

They had got to within a pistol-shot of the dwelling when from out the door sprung Bird Blackwell in desperate haste, a pair of saddlebags over his shoulder, and a revolver in each hand.

Before a signal could bring all of Baldy's men together in order that they might capture the assassin, the villain bounded like a scared buck toward a *motte* of oaks, shooting as he ran, and making his way in mad haste.

His black and snaky eyes were glaring with murderous madness, as he darted directly toward the men who sought to capture him.

Three sharp reports rung on the night air, which were soon after followed by as many more, and two of the rancheros fell dead, while two more rolled in agony upon the ground, yelling from their torturing wounds—the shots fired at Blackbird by excited men in such a hurried manner doing him no injury.

He dashed into the *motte*, soon returning, mounted upon a magnificent black horse.

With a loud yell of derision and exultation, the outlaw drove spurs and galloped up the Guadalupe at headlong speed; a branded assassin, fleeing from his childhood's home with a certain consciousness that he could never return to it.

The shooting of Captain Warrington of itself outlawed him; and now he had killed two more men, which fact would cause him to be hunted far and wide.

Surely the punishment of crime commences at the very moment that crime is committed.

Blackbird drove spurs unmercifully, and sped up the Guadalupe at terrific velocity, heading for he knew not where.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FELONS FOLLOWERS.

RECKLESS and dissipated as were the associates of Bird Blackwell, all of them carrying canteens of whisky attached to their saddles, they were sobered, amazed, and appalled as they dashed up to the blazing logs, which were all that remained of Lacrosse Ranch, and saw the mutilated corpse of the old major.

Eager as they had been to lynch Lionel, the lariat being already prepared for the purpose and held by one of their number, every thought of any further pursuit of the young man vanished.

With the exception of a few most emphatic ejaculations of astonishment and horror, as they rode around the blazing ruins and discov-

ered the bodies of the poor negroes hacked and gashed beyond recognition, nothing was said, all seeming to have become most deeply impressed and affected by the terrible scene. They had no words to express what they felt.

It could not be otherwise than that they should meditate upon the sudden and awful calamities that had fallen like an avalanche upon the unhappy man whom they were pursuing.

They well know, in their inmost souls, that Lionel Lacrosse was superior to themselves in all things, and that he would have been justified in resenting to the death the gross insult that had been publicly put upon him by Captain Warrington; and few there were among them who did not believe that the officer had again assaulted the young planter while in the bottom timber, and perhaps with a deadly weapon, which, as he felt that he was stricken with death, he might have hurled into the waters of Salado Creek, with the bitter resolve that his revenge should be felt even after the breath had left him, by thus leading all to believe that he had been assassinated by Lionel.

Notwithstanding this, to these men natural reasonings, they hated the young ranchero, and were, or had been, anxious to "start a lynch picnic," with Lionel as a victim, just for the excitement of the thing, and to rid themselves of a successful rival in all their sports—a man whose exemplary character put them to shame.

Now, however, that the excitement of the chase was over, and their brains were somewhat freed from the effects of liquor by the horrible scene before them, and knowing that Lionel must have discovered his father's corpse, and had been compelled to flee for his life from his ruined home and his dead—banished from them forever—all this forced them to feel some sympathy for the fugitive, and banished every desire to do him harm.

After a survey of the ruins, all gathered, still seated upon their horses, near to the mangled form of Major Lacrosse.

After a short silence, during which all eyes had been fixed upon the blood-stained body, one spoke:

"Hit's ther dang'd 'Paches, boyees, an' I don't reckon ther red devils hes bin on ther Salado afore in five year."

"Dog-goned ef Lionel ain't hevin' hit pasted onter him mighty thick," said another; "an' gittin' all ther danguation a dozen men orter hev shoved on 'em in a bunch all ter wonst!"

"You are right there, pard," said a third; "and I, for one, am feeling mean and streaked for hunting him like a dog. How do we know whether he did not have good cause to plug the captain, even after he was struck in the face? And I would have put a ball in the officer's heart then, without waiting for anything else."

"The reds will get him, and that will end this game, and the Lacrosse family with it," asserted a fourth.

"Whar in thunderation did Blackbird skute tew?" asked the first speaker. "He didn't glide Guadalupe-ways, thet's sartin."

"There you've got me, for one," said another. "It's the strangest part of the day's doings. He was dead down on Lionel Lacrosse, and swore he'd make him fight before night. Bird was rearing mad on account of ther captain's daughter bein' so thick with Lacrosse."

Further conversation was here interrupted by the rapid approach of Single-Eye; his horse covered with foam, and panting laboriously.

The old scout's optic blazed with intense fury, as he at first supposed that the dissipated associates of Bird Blackwell, maddened by not being able to capture Lionel, and half-crazed with liquor, had fired Lacrosse Ranch; but, as he came nearer, and saw the expression upon their faces, and then discovered the gashed and scalped corpse of Major Lacrosse tied to the tree, he was struck dumb with horror and astonishment.

He jerked Skip-lively to his haunches, near the group of rancheros, and sat looking on in grim silence.

After some moments, the men all gazing at the old scout, and he at the mutilated dead, he swept the crowd with his eye, and then burst out, in a hoarse and strangely unnatural voice which betrayed the great and torturing emotions that swayed him:

"Dog my cats! What does this hyer biz mean, an' whar's Lionel thet yer war calkerlatin' on stringin' up?"

"Though, ef yer hes any inclernation ter do thet-a-way till yit, I'm a-spittin' hit fa'r an' squar' thet I'll lay every one on yer out cold thet lays a paw onter him, er pulls a lariat ter choke him, ef hit takes ther hull time I'm 'p'inted ter linger on this hyer ball o' dirt."

All noticed that Single-Eye had both of his revolvers at full cock, ready to grasp, point, and pull trigger in a moment's time.

They also knew that the old scout not only meant every word he said, but he was the man to carry out his threat to the last letter.

However, there was now a favorable opportunity to turn his mind from themselves to the Indian raiders; and one of the rancheros quickly appointed himself spokesman by at once replying to the scout.

"Do you not see, Single-Eye, that the devilish Apaches have been here? This is no time for us to quarrel among ourselves. Lionel Lacrosse has escaped, we know not where, and we are thankful now that he came to no harm at our hands."

"There are proofs enough here—sad and terrible proofs—that he has had enough of misery hurled upon him in a single day, to cause him to blow his own brains out. I, for one, was excited by drink, and I regret that I acted at all in this affair."

"There is no doubt that young Lacrosse had a right to demand satisfaction for the insult put upon him by Captain Warrington, and we do not know that the captain did not assault him again when they met in the timber—perhaps with a deadly weapon, although nothing of the kind was found."

"What surprises me is that Lionel did not state what must have been the facts of the case in his explanation of the tragic affair."

"I'm ormighty full o' glad ter hear yer sling thet sort o' gab," said the old scout, "'coz hit goes ter show yer ain't all bad from runnin' with thet dang'd, condemned cuss Blackbird; fer he air a black bird clean through."

"He air ther coward kiote what shot ther capt'in, pullin' trigger from the bushes et ther same time Lionel shot et ther snake, es he tole yer hisself."

"I cctched ther cuss, an' tuck ther six from him what he hed fired; but he squirmed away inter ther bush. Howsomever, I'll help ter run him up a limb, afore I flop over an' go under."

With these words Single-Eye let down the hammers of his revolvers, returned the weapons to his belt, and then, without further notice of the rancheros, who stood gazing one at another in silent astonishment, he dismounted and strode up to the corpse of Major Lacrosse, saying, more to himself than to them:

"Wa-al, what in thunderation air comin' nex'? Ef this hyer hain't bin a black day fer poor Lionel, I'll mastercate ther 'Merikin eagle without pickin' out pin-feathers er singein'. Dang my ole heart ef hit doesn't 'pear es though this hyer world air 'bout ter bu'st up!"

"I'm plum upshot, an' feels like a "creased" mustang arter he 'gins ter come back ter biz. Dang ther red bellyuns! How kim they ter p'int this-a-way? Lionel air bound ter go plum crazy now, sure es shootin', ef I doesn't hump myself right lively an' find him, which I sw'ar I know I can't do, 'count o' his bein' on a hefty stompede, an' Skip-lively air 'bout bu'st-ed o' wind."

The astonished rancheros were conversing in low tones in regard to the strange assertions of the old scout in connection with Blackbird, which, perfectly astounding though they were, they had no other alternative than to accept as the truth; and Single-Eye, turning abruptly, asked:

"Did ary one o' yer git a peep et Lionel when yer broke brush?"

"No," replied, at once, the man who had first spoken; "we have not set eyes upon him since he broke away from us at the scene of the murder."

"Have you any idea, Single-Eye, where Bird Blackwell is now?"

"I hes a idee thet ther devil hes gi'n him a lift," answered the old scout; "an' tuck him a piece from Brown's Ranch. But thar's a hefty crowd a-huntin' him, an' I wouldn't give shucks fer his hide er ha'r, arter they gits a peep et ther cuss; er, fer ther matter, ther scalp o' any one what's with him."

"He can't stake hisself out in West Texas arter this last condemned biz."

"But ther wo'stest o' ther hull thing, air

ter think that Lionel air a-skutin' fer life from ther Salado, an' leavin' his dad's corpus on 'count o' bein' 'cused o' murder, when all hands knows now, an' mought ha' know'd in the fust place, that he air es innercent es a suckin' pappoose.

"I'm b'ilin' over with indig', fer I knows he won't stop 'round civerlize long 'nough ter find out that everybody knows he ain't ther man what shot ther capt'in.

"Ef yeou boyees keer ter take ther biggest kind o' a cuss offen yer heads, fer a-huntin' ther poor fellar, jist fix things up hyer-a-ways, an' plant ther major under this tree, an' ther poor niggers out yunder by ther kerral. Ther ole man an' Skip' air purty nigh broke up, but I reckon we'll levant on ther trail, an' see what we kin do toward gittin' within shootin' distance o' Lionel, ef we hes ter kick grass' an' stomp sand, cl'ar ter ther Staked Plains.

"Yer kin tell 'leetle Winnie, an' Baldy Brown, an' 't'others, that yer see'd Single-Eye, an' that he's slid toward sunset arter Lionel, with a loose scalp, but wi' plenty o' vim under hit.

"I'll raise ha'r, an' hide too, afore I turn tail—dang my perrarer peregrinatin' pictur' ef I doesn't!

"I'm a-bankerin' fer bleed, chuck-full o' hyderfobic prussic acid indig', an' listenin' hard until I hears ther 'Pache yells. So-long; Skip' an' I air off!"

As he spoke these last words; the old scout mounted his horse, and giving a parting look at the corpse of poor Major Lacrosse, and not deigning to notice the rancheros further, he rode away to the westward; disappearing in the darkness, beyond the lurid light cast by the fires, the cheers of the men whom he left standing there reaching his ears, as he drove spurs, and dashed up the Salado.

CHAPTER X.

AMONG THE APACHES.

SOME twenty miles northwest from San Antonio, a small stream, a branch of Salado Creek, runs along the bed of what might be appropriately called a canyon.

Standing on the bank of this little stream, which here and there forms into pools some three feet in depth, one, if facing north, would have in front of him a precipitous bank, a hundred feet in height.

This bank of earth, its base being but a few yards from the stream, has, on the opposite side, a rocky cliff, some fifty feet higher, for its *vis-a-vis*.

Approaching this canyon from the north-east, one is on a rolling prairie, and sees nothing ahead of him except the rock cliff on the opposite side of the chasm. He little thinks, until near the verge of the same, that his course in that direction is at an end; the deep canyon, the bed of which in some places is covered with a mat of rich grass, prevents further progress.

However, if one rides down this somewhat peculiar bank, which seems to have been formed by the sinking of a vast mass of earth in a snake-like line, until a point is reached where the cliff beyond ends, and a plain is seen like that which he has been traversing, he will discover a wide trail down the side of the bank, which seems to have been cut out from it, and down which, although it is so steep, a wagon could be taken without much difficulty.

This trail, or road, was cut out by rancheros, a few of whom established themselves near the canyon, and who were forced to go to the same for water, taking their casks for that purpose on wagons.

These rancheros, however, at the time of which we are now speaking, had been driven from their cabins by the Indians; leaving the rude edifices to decay, or to serve as stopping-places for scouts, rangers, or cattle-hunters.

It was the night succeeding the day of the terrible occurrences on the Salado, that Lionel Lacrosse, upon his fagged steed, rode slowly down this trail into the canyon, and along its bed, turning many a bend.

After allowing his horse to drink of the cool water of the stream, he dismounted, and throwing himself upon the sward thrust his fevered face into the creek, and swallowed the refreshing wine of nature.

Having put some distance between himself and the trail that led down into the canyon, the young man turned his horse, crossing the creek, and entering a small *motte* of trees, that grew at the base of the steep, rough, rocky bluff.

Here, he again dismounted, loosened the girth to his saddle, removed the bridle, and secured the lariat to a small but tough bush in the middle of an opening, which was within the circular *motte*, and entirely screened from view.

His blooded well-tryed steed, began at once to tear, with avidity, the long rich grass from the sod; and Lionel then threw himself upon his outspread blanket, removing his sombrero, and running his fingers, in a nervous manner, through his long wavy hair.

The much-wronged, terribly bereaved and soul stricken young man was pale as death itself; his eyes blazed unnaturally, and in their depths lay an unspeakable anguish and hopeless despair, that was harrowing to look upon.

Up into the star-studded dome of blue his gaze was drawn, as if speculating upon the mystery of the unlimited space, and wondering if the Almighty Creator of these countless worlds could allow those made in his image to murder and torture their fellow-beings, rejoicing and exulting in the act.

During his terrible ride he had suffered to an extent such as few men are called upon to endure, and this suffering was plainly shown in his face.

A short time he lay as we have described; then his meditations were brought to an end, as far as star-gazing was concerned, for he sprung to a sitting posture, proving by his movements and actions and the change in his expression, the new trail his mind was bent upon.

He jerked his revolvers from their scabbards, examined the caps, and then, half cocking the weapons, ran the cylinders over the palm of his hand to ascertain if each chamber was loaded and in order.

His seven-shot Colt's revolving rifle he also inspected, laying it by his side, covering the lock and cylinder from the dew with the corner of his blanket,

It was evident by these actions, as well as by the desperate and determined look upon Lionel's face, that he had, by a herculean effort of will, made his thirst for revenge to crowd somewhat into the background his terrible anguish and despair.

His more recent reasonings led him to believe that, whoever the cowardly assassin of Captain Warrington was, he must eventually be found out.

He would leave some trace that would betray him, and thus exculpate himself from any and all connection with the murder. Possibly the slain man might have had a desperate enemy among his own troopers, who had followed him to the Salado for the purpose of assassinating him.

Generous himself, our hero could not think for a moment that any one hated him to the extent of committing a murder for the express purpose of fastening such a crime upon him. It could not be possible.

The young ranchero dared not think of poor Winnie, but strove to beat back every thought of her to the utmost power of his will; for he feared, if his mind dwelt too much upon the past, it might give way.

The one consoling thought concerning the sadly bereaved young maiden, was that she had seemed to believe him innocent of her father's death; and he knew that Baldwin Brown, faithful in everything, would seek to confirm her in this.

There seemed nothing now open for him except to fly from the haunts of civilized men, away from all that he held dear on earth, being denied even the sad privilege of burying his own murdered father.

Thus outlawed, he must wander the wilds, for how long he knew not; indeed, it now appeared to him that he should never again look upon the scenes of his childhood, never again ride along the banks of the Salado.

That the mob of rancheros would hang him if they caught him, he had not the slightest doubt; and, innocent though he was, he did not wish to take the lives of those who believed him guilty, even in his own defense.

The terrible torture of his aged parent, however, he had sworn to avenge, and his examination of his arms was prompted by recalling the oath he had taken over that father's mutilated corpse. He had gone into the canyon with two objects. One was to rest himself and his horse, and allow the noble beast the feed it so much needed. The other was to lie in wait for the Apache fiends, that he might begin his work of vengeance.

Lionel had often been in this canyon, and he knew that many war-parties that had raided down-country, passing west of San Antonio, halted here, following it up by day, secure from observation.

The presence of the Indians on the Salado, and their dash toward the Guadalupe, almost convinced the young man that they would be in the canyon before midnight, or certainly before daylight.

He felt sure that they would encamp near where he himself had halted, for it was a position easy to defend, it being impossible to attack the savages except from up or down the chasm, the sides of the same being too abrupt to descend.

Lionel had no inclination for sleep; in fact, his nervous system had been so terribly shattered that it was impossible to quiet himself to the degree that was necessary to induce slumber. So he lay planning for and pondering on the future, realizing at last too plainly that his life and hopes were ruined, that the past must be considered as a dream and the future a puzzling mystery torturing to think of.

Thus he lay, at times in a dazed state, his mind as free from all thoughts as the rock upon which his head rested. How long he continued thus he knew not. Suddenly he sprung to a sitting posture, and with eyes blazing he listened intently, to make sure that his ears had not been playing him false.

He heard nothing. Resuming his former position, and bringing reason to bear on the situation, he lay flat upon the ground, placing his ear to it.

Soon he became conscious of a slight rumble, an almost imperceptible trembling of the earth, and he decided that a large number of animals of some kind were descending the distant slope into the canyon.

From the cessation of the sound he again concluded that the animals were drinking at the creek, and he immediately tightened the girth of his saddle, bridled his horse and hung his rifle on the saddle-born.

This done he again sunk to the earth; again he listened, his features showing plainly that his recent preparations had been well-timed.

He could now hear plainly the continuous rumble of a large number of approaching horses, knowing well, too, that they were ridden and controlled by men from the way in which their feet were lifted and put down. So uniform a sound could not come from a stampede.

Lionel felt that he had not long to wait before he could decide the character of the approaching party. He was confident it was not the rancheros in pursuit of himself, for there were evidently here five times their number. Stepping quickly to his horse, he spoke a few low words to the noble animal and then advanced softly to the edge of the thicket and peered out upon the now moonlit bed of the canyon.

A moment after, an Apache chief, with three eagle-feathers flaunting from his fillet, urged his horse round the bend and up the canyon on the opposite side of the creek from Lionel's position, but not twenty yards from the *motte* that screened him.

Close following rode a dozen warriors, and then two-score of horses necked together, and all secured by lariats to the saddles of two Indians that controlled them.

Upon some of these steeds were large packs, and upon others dead and wounded brave, while, riding in the rear, were nearly a-score more, constituting beyond a doubt one branch of a war-party, all of whom would meet up-country, at Palo Pinto, or Santa Ana's Peak.

Lionel Lacrosse trembled with intense passion, and an insane thirst for vengeance.

Passing before him, were his own horses, his brand being plainly discernible, even did he not know the animals without this proof. A shepherd knows each one of his flock, though a stranger can see no difference between them. So with a ranchero.

Lionel recognized the horses and knew that the fiends who had tortured his beloved father were before him. He clutched the branches for support, reeling like a drunken man with the overpowering intensity of his passion and hatred.

The paint-daubed horde passed from view, around a bend, but the furious rage and thirst for revenge that convulsed and half-crazed Lionel increased each moment. He paced back and forth in the little opening, his teeth grating together, his hands tightly

climbed upon his revolver, and his eyes glaring with an almost ungovernable fury.

The time had come to carry out, to fulfill his oath of vengeance.

And the young man was ready and eager to keep that vow to the very letter, regardless of consequences; even braving a terrible death, such as had been that of his loved father.

He knew that, a half-mile up the canyon, there was a cattle-path; and that, but a short distance from this point, there was a broken and cedar-scattered cliff, which afforded many safe hiding-places.

And now, another fact burst upon his mind.

It was this. Just a short distance from this path, and before reaching it, was a large mass of logs, drift-wood and brush, that had been swept there in a freshet, and lodged; it being no easy matter for a horse to squeeze his way between them and the bank of the canyon.

As Lionel thought of this, knowing that the wood was as dry as tinder, it seemed to him that there was a special Providence in it for him.

He knew by the sounds that reached his ears, that the Apaches had encamped. He waited, therefore, but a moment, and sprung upon his horse, ready for a dash through the midst of the fiendish torturers; though he well knew that death threatened him at every bound of his horse, and that torture most terrible would be his fate, if captured.

Not a moment, however, did he hesitate.

He urged his horse over the creek, and then slowly advanced up the canyon on the soft sward, until, turning a bend, he discovered the animals feeding, and the smoke of camp fires beyond.

Clutching the reins tightly in his right hand, and not daring to risk his horse at loose rein until he had passed the animals with which it had roamed the prairies; Lionel, with rifle in his left hand, at full cock, drove spurs deep, and shot at terrific speed through the scattering herd, giving a series of wild, piercing yells. Then, taking the reins in his teeth, he raised his rifle quickly, as the red fiends sprung from the sward to their feet, in alarm.

In rapid succession the seven chambers of his rifle were emptied; then, with lightning-like movements, he reslung the weapon at his saddle-horn, and jerked a revolver in each hand, as his frenzied horse bounded into the camp, the spurs torturing its flanks at every spring!

Then followed a rattling discharge of the six-shooters, mingled with death-yells, howls of agony, war-whoops and rallying commands, while through the air flew volleys of arrows after the daring avenger, who dashed scathless up the canyon.

The next instant a score of maddened braves—all who were able to pursue—were galloping in pursuit, yelling like fiends, they having been so amazed and bewildered at the unexpected alarm, and so astounded at the daring dash of a single horseman into their camp, that for the moment most important to them they were dazed and motionless.

Lionel spurred for dear life, and urged his horse past the huge pile of drift-wood; then, springing to the earth, he ignited with a match the dry leaves and dead grass beneath the mass of brush at the bottom of the drift.

His life depended upon that single match, and the little flame that it kindled; and the reader may, in a measure, imagine the intense interest and agonizing anxiety that ruled our hero as he watched the blaze. At first it gave but little hope. Soon, however, to his joy, it crept upward, communicating from one dry twig to another; and while Lionel watched it, he slipped three caps on nipples, and three cartridges into the chambers.

There was no time for more; for, as soon as this was accomplished, around the bend, toward the drift, shot the hideous Apache horde, vengeful and exultant yells breaking from their throats, as they saw the daring hated white man, who had dashed through their camp, and shot down so many of their braves.

Lionel knew that he must now stop them in their mad charge, or he was lost.

The logs afforded him protection from their arrows, but the savages would urge their horses, one by one, through the gap, should the fire die out, and then his doom would be sealed!

He made careful aim at the leading Indian, bringing the painted fiend to the earth with a death-howl, and causing the others to hesitate and pull up. The Apaches paused in bewilderment.

Another shot, another yell, and then, to the great relief and joy of Lionel, the flames leaped up from the brush, filling the path with smoke, and blaze, and heat, thus insuring his safety by making the drift impossible to be passed, in a very short time, by either beast or man.

Mounting his horse, the young planter rode up the path to the plain above him. Then, seated upon his steed, in plain and bold relief against the blue sky, he gave a parting shot into the horde of yelling, baffled, furious fiends, drew out his knife, and circled the glittering blade threateningly in the air.

Then, whirling his horse, he sped away over the moonlit rolling prairie, toward the northwest.

Lionel Lacrosse had struck his first blow in avenging his father's terrible death, but not his last.

CHAPTER XI.

THE WAY OF THE WORLD.

THE rancheros on the Rio Guadalupe, Salado and Cibola Creeks were thrown into a state of the greatest excitement by the tragic occurrences of that eventful day and night that had changed the happiness of Winnie Warrington and Lionel Lacrosse to the deepest grief and anguish, banishing the latter from all that was dear to him by association, and making him, as well as Winnie, an orphan.

Not for years had the Indians been known to venture so far down-country, except south of San Antonio; and the day following the massacre at the Lacrosse Ranch the news fled like wildfire that the Apaches had committed many murders also on the Guadalupe, to which point they had proceeded from the Salado.

Having secured many blooded horses at the ranch, they had been enabled to put a long stretch of country between them and their pursuers before the latter could follow up their trail.

The excitement was also great in San Antonio, especially in army circles, and an ambulance was sent to Salado Creek, with an escort of his own company, for the remains of Captain Warrington.

Heartfelt sympathy was extended on all sides to the bereaved daughter, whose suffering had been increased when she learned that the father of Lionel had been tortured to death by Apaches on the same evening that her own and only parent had been assassinated.

Not only this, but Lionel had been hotly pursued by the lynchers and forced to fly for his life, not knowing that proofs had been discovered that pointed clearly to the real murderer of her father.

All this was dreadful and caused Winnie the bitterest agony whenever the young ranchero was brought to her mind.

He was flying now for life, seeking to escape an ignominious death, which was to be his doom in punishment for a crime he had not committed.

He was galloping madly into the wilds, desperate and filled with hopeless despair—forced to leave the mutilated remains of his butchered father to be buried by stranger hands.

She could not allow herself to dwell upon his most pitiable condition. She felt, within herself, that it must drive him to insanity and death.

At the inquest upon the body of Captain Warrington, the brandy-flask, found in the thicket by Single-Eye, was produced by Baldy Brown, also the revolver with which the crime had undoubtedly been committed.

The brandy was analyzed by a chemist from San Antonio, and he declared it to be drugged, the brother officers of the murdered man having insisted upon an examination of the liquor when they heard the testimony in regard to the strange manner and actions of the captain on that fatal evening.

This caused many to form a correct conclusion in regard to matters connected with the crime, they being now confident that Bird Blackwell had drugged the captain in order that the officer, thus excited, might assault young Lacrosse, toward whom he had previously shown such marked dislike.

They knew that the assassin hated the young planter for excelling him in character and manliness, and they also recalled the fact that Blackbird had evidently become infatuated with Winnie, who had shown a decided preference for Lionel.

Infuriated against his rival, and seeing an opportunity of avenging himself, in this horri-

ble way, without, as he thought, any danger to himself, he had fired the fatal shot; but the arrival of Single-Eye had caused his diabolical plans to be completely frustrated, and he to become a hunted outlaw, with a price set upon his head.

From the fact that the old scout could not be found, to testify at the inquest as to the identity of the supposed assassin, a verdict was rendered to the effect that "Captain Scott Warrington came to his death, by a gunshot wound, inflicted by some person unknown."

Notwithstanding this verdict, however, all were thoroughly convinced that the real murderer was the fugitive Bird Blackwell; his desperation when the rancheros attempted to capture him, his shooting down a number of them, and the robbery of his father, all were conclusive proofs of his guilt.

Especially was this the case, when considered in connection with the discovery of the flask and revolver, together with the finding of Bird, in his lurking-place, near the scene of the murder.

Winnie Warrington was filled with something akin to superstitious amazement, when she thought of the several tragic happenings since her meeting with Lionel Lacrosse—a meeting that had seemed to them both to promise so much of joy and happiness in the future.

All the world seemed now, to the poor girl, suddenly transformed from a bright and lovely garden to a desert waste. All her hopes and aims were as naught. She appeared to be sinking into a listless and hopeless state, so changed from her former self as to cause sorrow to all around her.

Sad indeed were the faces of the "Boys in Blue," as with muffled drums and arms reversed, they followed the remains of their captain to their last resting-place, on Powder-House Hill, east of San Antonio.

The bereaved daughter, accompanied by her aunt and uncle, with Baldwin Brown and many other citizen friends, followed the government ambulance that contained the corpse.

The respectful sorrow manifested by the troops, was occasioned as much by their sympathy for Winnie, "the Angel of the Army," as for the death of the captain; and all felt relieved when, some days after the funeral, a brother of Captain Warrington arrived from Fort Mason, an express having been sent for him.

This gentleman, a lieutenant of cavalry, was an officer noted for daring bravery. He immediately offered to become the guardian of his niece, and most affectionately urged her to return with him to his post, where he had comfortable quarters.

The Browns, on the other hand, were desirous that Winnie should make her home on Salado Creek; a request to which the poor girl decided to accede for the present; but, being accustomed to army life, she expressed a willingness to join her uncle at Fort Mason, after a time.

The will of Captain Warrington was found in his death at his quarters; and, in this document, his brother, Lieutenant Warren Warrington, was appointed trustee for Winnie, there being some ten thousand dollars bequeathed to her, the amount being deposited in French's Banking-house in San Antonio.

Lieutenant Warrington returned to Fort Mason and Winnie to the ranch of her uncle and aunt on Salado Creek, she being now most anxious to obtain some tidings of Lionel Lacrosse. But the scouts and rancheros who had followed the trail of the marauding Indians all returned, the red-men having traveled so rapidly that it had been impossible to overtake them.

In consequence of this, no reliable tidings were gained of Lionel, who was, however, supposed to be still on the trail of the Apaches.

The shooting by Bird Blackwell of the rancheros who were led by Baldwin Brown to the Guadalupe in search of the assassin of Captain Warrington, caused intense excitement also. Especially was this the case when the father of the accused, having been aroused by the reports of the pistols, ascertained that he had been robbed of a large amount of gold, by his own son.

But the poor old man considered the loss of his money as nothing, compared with the shame and disgrace that his wretched boy had brought upon him. He avowed most earnestly that he never again wished to look on the face of Bird; but Baldwin Brown assured him that

there would probably never be an opportunity, as the assassin would not dare show himself north of San Antonio, a heavy reward being offered for him, dead or alive, by the brother officers of Captain Warrington.

Time passed, and the excitement consequent upon the strange assassination of the captain and the raid, so unusually far to the eastward, of the Apaches, died away. No tidings meanwhile were gained either of Bird Blackwell or Lionel Lacrosse, neither of whom dared return.

Winnie Warrington, as she had promised, joined her uncle at Fort Mason; and, some time after, when the lieutenant was ordered to a post further west, she accompanied him. But it was only to be plunged into deeper despair, and to suffer privation and horrors, to which her former experience was as nothing. To behold the only one whom she loved, and to whom she was true as steel, battling for life with hideous painted savages, whom he sought to prevent from harming or capturing herself.

To see him struggle with herculean strength to reach her side, only to be crushed to the earth, and then bound by blood-dripping hands, while fiendish eyes glared exultantly into his and then into her own, causing her to faint with sickening aversion and deathly horror—this the future had in store for her.

But we will proceed with our story in detail and not further anticipate.

To do this, we must follow trails that will lead us into dread and terrible scenes, which pen can but feebly describe, in their dread but truthful details.

CHAPTER XII.

SNAKES IN THE GRASS.

THE old St. Louis and Santa Fe stage mail-route, via Fort Belknap, Horse-Head Crossing, and El Paso, fords the Red Fork of the Colorado River, about twenty miles a little west of south from Fort Chadbourne; thence on, for thirty miles to the Rio Concho, which is forded eight miles west of old Camp Johnston, where Fort Concho is now located, and from whence a government wagon trail leads to San Antonio de Bexar.

Some six months after the tragic occurrences on Salado Creek, a horseman was proceeding, at a leisurely pace, along the wagon-trail just mentioned, between Camp Johnston and the St. Louis and Santa Fe stage-road.

Although much tanned from continuous prairie travel, besides being attired in buckskin of his own make, and wearing his hair long, any one who had seen him within the last five years would most certainly have recognized him as Lionel Lacrosse.

The same free, honest look of the eye, the same noble bearing, and finely developed form, would anywhere command attention.

He is mounted upon the same black horse, although the animal has changed more than its master, having bettered its condition since we last saw it in the gallant charge upon the Apaches, in the canyon near the Salado.

As the young man rides on, sitting his steed in a listless attitude, some motion of the horse attracts his attention, his head is raised quickly, his eyes sweeping his surroundings, while his face assumes a most desperate and revengeful look; indicating that his trails have led where dangers often come suddenly and unheralded upon him—dangers that he has not avoided, but has met with vengeful fury, giving back defiant yell for savage whoop, as he charged upon the savage torturers of his sire, and desecrators of his home.

Now he guides his horse from the plain into the bottom timber of the Rio Concho; not, however, until he observes a herd of antelope emerge from the same—these animals having been in the timber, enjoying the cool shade, and drinking of the waters. Their presence proved that no red-men were lurking within the bottom.

His horse immediately proceeded to the brink of the stream, there to slake its thirst; and Lionel, filling his canteen, proceeded on, up the Concho, holding his deadly Colt's rifle in the hollow of his arm, at half-cock, ready for instant use.

And thus we take leave of this much-wronged man, on his way to the ford, where he is doomed to have his heart's wounds opened afresh, his very soul to be filled with the utmost joy and wonder at the start, then with anxiety and agony, and last with a reckless bravery that crushes foes like reeds

before him. Crushes them at the first, but alas to no purpose.

Had Lionel Lacrosse, when he turned his horse into the timber, forded the Concho, passed through the belt of trees, and gazed from the same out upon the north plain that stretched to the Rio Colorado, he would have seen a government ambulance, drawn by four mules, and a mounted escort of soldiers, eight in number, including a sergeant, riding in front and rear of the vehicle. The sun was just setting, and although the parties spoken of were nearly a mile from the timber, the glint of the sunlight on the arms of the cavalrymen would have decided their character to him at once.

Whether, however, his discovery of the soldiers and ambulance would have changed the order of the events to be recorded, it is impossible to decide; most probably not.

The escort were members of the old and gallant Second Cavalry, as the brass figures upon their caps proved; and they were well used to frontier service, as was also shown by the sergeant's ordering one of the men to gallop on ahead to the ford, and inspect the same; and to give the alarm, or return, if the presence of foes was in any way indicated.

On the front seat by the side of an infantry soldier who was driving, was Lieutenant Warrington.

He was engaged in conversation with a very beautiful young lady—none other than Winnie Warrington, his niece, the daughter of his murdered brother.

The old sad expression is still noticeable on the face of the young girl, but it serves only to enhance her beauty; giving her a more ethereal appearance.

The same wealth of golden hair, crowned by a wide-brimmed straw hat, decorated with tiny prairie flowers; a neat costume of some pale-blue fragile fabric, in keeping with her complexion, caused her to appear almost fairy-like. It was an enchanting picture.

"Yes, Winnie," said her uncle, in answer to a question from our heroine; "it is yet a long way to Horse-Head Crossing. It is about a hundred miles, and the most desolate portion of our whole route; for the reason that, almost the entire distance, it is an unbroken plain, barren and devoid of vegetation.

"Beyond the Rio Pecos, most of the country is broken and mountainous, presenting varied, interesting, and most grand prospects."

"But," said Winnie, with a shudder, "are we not entering the most dangerous section of Texas? Are not the Apaches now on the war-path, and we forced to pass through their hunting-grounds?"

"Yes, my dear; we are entering the haunts of the Apaches, who are, for that matter, always on the war path. And they always will be, until they are exterminated, root and branch.

"Lone Wolf is the most bloodthirsty and merciless chief on the continent; but they seldom attack Government escorts, knowing that they must lose a number of their braves, even if they succeed, and warriors are scarce with them.

"Lone Wolf is cunning, and dashes in among the ranches down-country, by night, carrying devastation and death, wherever his war-cry sounds.

"His tactics are, to start from the mountains beyond the Pecos with a large war-party; then, as they reach Santa Ana's Peak, or further south in the Bandera Hills, this party is divided into half a dozen, all going in different directions on their errand of butchery, but to meet again at some point agreed upon, with their plunder.

"They ride at a headlong gallop, covering eighty miles in a day, or a night. None can know where the red demons may strike. They are here to-day, and far from pursuit by to-morrow. But my explanations are not such as will relieve your mind, I admit.

"However, I assure you, Winnie, we have really nothing to fear. We shall reach Camp Johnston to-night, and be in good quarters. Perhaps there may be a detachment about to leave for El Paso, with which we can travel; but you must bear in mind that we are on the stage-road, over which coaches are passing twice each week, while we have an armed detail of eight men, not counting your uncle Warren, who will die in his tracks before his little niece shall come to harm."

"Do not speak of the Indians again, uncle,"

said Winnie, "and I will endeavor to dismiss all thoughts of them from my mind; but I have been greatly worried, ever since we left Camp Colorado.

"They told me there so much of the horrible doings of the Apaches that it has revived the terrible memory of the massacres on Salado Creek and the Guadalupe.

"I do wish, uncle Warren, we could get some tidings of Mr. Lacrosse. Only think what a terrible injustice he is suffering, and he proved innocent of everything!

"It is too dreadful to think of, that he should believe himself to be outlawed! Nothing has been heard either of him or of the real murderer, Bird Blackwell, although Single-Eye has been scouting the Mexican and Indian borders in search of both ever since that fearful tragedy."

"It is very sad and mysterious," said the lieutenant, "that the young man should have had so much misery launched upon him at once; but I hope he will soon be found, and that the future will in some way atone for the past in his case."

"Let me tell you, uncle," said the young girl, "I have since that terrible day been greatly consoled by the reflection that I gave Lionel Lacrosse to understand, when the mad mob were about to lynch him, that I did not believe him to be guilty.

"There was conscious innocence in his every word and look. It was a terrible position to be in.

"But see, uncle, we are nearing the line of timber that you say marks the course of the Rio Concho. What a beautiful green is the foliage, and how cool and inviting it appears! Look, uncle, at that glorious, golden sunset!"

"It is indeed beautiful," agreed the lieutenant; "and I am not feeling very much grieved at saying good-by to the god of day, for he has ruled us most tyrannically since his appearance this morning.

"Yes, yonder is the Concho, teeming with fish and its timber with game; but we must pass them all by and hasten on to Camp Johnston."

Little dreamed poor Winnie Warrington that the beautiful green foliage, "so cool and inviting," served to screen and favor a horde of demoniac savages, who were eager, madly eager, for the blood and scalps of the party.

Little dreamed Lieutenant Warrington that the timber of the Concho, which he so regretted to pass, on account of its "teeming with game," teemed with paint-daubed Apaches, whose devilish gaze had been bent upon the escort and ambulance since the party was no bigger than a black speck upon the plain.

But this it was.

For along each side of the trail, on either bank of the stream, amid the dense undergrowth, crouched four-score of hideous feather-and-scalp-bedizened braves, their bows in hand, and the deadly steel-pointed arrows fitted to string.

Thus crouched many of the war-party, while others, further back, mounted upon their half-wild steeds, stood ready to do their part of the bloody work and insure the capture or death of all.

The black, snake-like eyes of the painted demons glittered and glared with a thirst for blood.

They glared out from the terribly-contrasting stripes of vermilion and white gypsum, as like hungry panthers, ready to spring upon their prey, they braced their bronzed and sinewy limbs and nerved their arms, bending the straight bows to an arch, bows which a white man could not bend an inch.

Thus they stood, the terrible war-whoop ready to burst with blood-curdling power and intonation from their brutal throats.

Yet on came the unsuspecting escort and the ambulance with its precious freight; and from down the Concho, oblivious of the presence of human beings, red or white, on toward the ford, at an easy pace, rode Lionel Lacrosse, little thinking what that golden sunset was to shut in upon him!

Little thought the young man that it was just such another terrible evening in his life that he had to his soul-felt sorrow passed through before, that was now closing that bright summer afternoon.

Little imagined he that the past events, so dread and horrible, and which had caused him to become an outlawed wanderer in the wilds, were now being revived with a new and fresh bitterness.

The horrors of the past, and that were never to be erased from his memory, were now to have other agonies piled upon them, and branded upon his brain as long as life was given him.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BITTERNESS OF DEATH.

SILENCE reigned in the bottom timber.

The song-birds of the day had fluttered to their resting-nooks, and the croakers and hooters of the night had not yet tuned their throats for their usual nocturnal concert.

The sun had sunk beneath the horizon, and the last of its golden arrows, shooting down through the foliage, seemed to transform the waters of the Concho into molten silver, and kissed the roseate cheeks of Winnie Warrington, now gazing with delight upon the weird scene before her.

The single soldier, who had been ordered on as advance scout, saw nothing and heard nothing to warn him of the deadly danger within the undergrowth. His horse, eager for drink, hastened down the steep decline into the ford, while its rider fixed his eyes upon the strangely silvered surface of the stream, which almost blinded him.

But its brightness was quickly changed to the blindness of death; for an unseen war-hatchet clove his skull, red hands and arms clutched him, and the next moment the horse and its dead rider had vanished from sight in the undergrowth.

Again all was silence. The scene was the same as before. The Concho glided on, smoothly and placidly, the few drops of blood on its surface being carried where they could tell no tales.

Soon after the sound of hoofs and wheels broke the stillness, and the sergeant, with two men, rode down the bank, their horses almost wild for water.

Not observing their comrade, the soldiers supposed that all was well, and that he had crossed the ford and gone on beyond the opposite timber.

The advance escort spurred their animals on through the waters, in order to give room for the ambulance, which came rolling down at full speed; the mules being more unmanageable than saddle-horses.

Into the Concho they dashed, until the middle of the river was gained. All the party were now in the stream, the waters of which, in its deepest part reached only to the hubs of the forward wheels of the ambulance.

Thus were they all positioned; their gaze taking in the full beauty of their surroundings, all in its strong light and shade seemingly typical of life and death.

But more suggestive of the latter than even the dark shades, were the sounds and sights that now broke from the same; indeed they were the signals of certain and instantaneous death to many of the unsuspecting mortals who sat their horses in the Rio Concho.

For the dread war-whoop of the Apaches, from four-score throats, burst in blood-curdling intonation from the dark undergrowth, followed quickly by volleys of arrows that glinted in the moonlight.

Not less than a dozen of these steel-tipped shafts pierced the vitals of each one of the escort; for the stream was narrow, and both sides were crowded with Indians.

With piercing cries of horror, the death-stricken boys in blue threw up their arms, and sunk back in their saddles, rolling into the river; while a score of the red fiends sprung into the stream, all eager for scalps.

As the horrible war-whoops sounded, and the clouds of arrows cut the air, poor Winnie sunk back, ghastly and speechless.

Lieutenant Warrington was himself for a moment appalled; the presence of his niece, so recently bereaved in such a terrible manner, causing him the greatest agony of mind. But he threw off this feeling, and jerking his revolvers, commenced to shoot every Indian he could get sure aim upon; yelling, at the same time, to the man at his side:

"Drive on, Tom! Drive on! For God's sake drive on!"

Terrible indeed was the scene; more like pandemonium in sight and sound than aught connected with earth. As Tom lashed the mules toward the opposite bank, three or four braves who were in the stream sprung to the heads of the mules, while others sought to climb into the ambulance.

But Lieutenant Warrington shot to kill, and

many a gurgling death-yell sounded as his victims sunk into the waters.

Not an arrow had been pointed at the occupants of the ambulance, strange to say, and it was evident to the officer that himself and niece were doomed to the torture. So he set his teeth and fought like a tiger at bay, while the mules struggled toward the opposite bank. But that promised no relief or safety, as it was lined with yelling Apaches.

Those yells and revolver-shots were heard by one who had often listened to the same hellish sounds before.

They reminded him of an oath that he had taken; and the scattering shots told him that white men were battling for life against blood-thirsty Apaches.

Instantly reins were gathered, rifle grasped, and the black half-breed steed urged through the brush to the open plain, and thence on to the ford, whence the sound proceeded.

Down the trail dashed the lone rider, regardless of his life. His only thought and object was to save, if possible, a white man from a terrible death.

But as this solitary rider, Lionel Lacrosse, came to the top of the decline, on the south side of the ford, he jerked his steed to its haunches, and sat for a moment grating his teeth at the scene below him.

The Concho was being thrashed to foam by frenzied animals, and painted savages swarmed in the waters, struggling through them to reach the corpses of the dead; while, on both banks, were a horde of yelling braves.

Directly in front of him was an ambulance, and a U. S. officer in uniform, with knife in hand, was slashing at warriors who strove to pull him from his seat, while the drivers lashed the mules madly.

All this Lionel saw at a single glance; but it was not that which occasioned his deep emotions.

There was within the center of this fearful scene an angelic face and form; for Winnie Warrington, seeing that her uncle was in danger of being jerked from his seat, had thrown off in part her horror, and grasping a revolver from the rear of the ambulance, had sprung over the back of the front seat, and presenting the weapon, had shot through the brain the Apache who had been about to drag Lieutenant Warrington into the water.

This was the sight that now met the eyes of Lionel, extorting from him the wild cry:

"Father in Heaven! Give me strength and skill to save Winnie Warrington!"

With a revolver in either hand, the daring rider dashed down the decline, darting through the braves on the bank; his magnificent steed crushing them to the earth beneath his hoofs. Direct to the ambulance he rode, just as a loud shriek of anguish came from Winnie's lips. Shooting with great rapidity every Apache that had his hand upon the mules, Lionel yelled at the same time:

"Whip up, for God's sake! Whip up, or you are lost!"

Then, as his eyes met those of the maiden whose image had never been absent from him, he added:

"Winnie Warrington, we meet again! We meet, but it is for the last time on earth. We are all doomed. Lash up! Lash up!"

This last order was to the driver, who was doing his best. Then, as the yells of frenzied rage from the foe again burst forth, and the mules galloped from the water, Winnie cried out:

"Oh, Lionel, Lionel, I must speak! Every one knows that you did not do that awful crime. It was Bird Blackwell who murdered my father!"

What a change came over that wronged man, even in that fearful moment, when these words reached his ear.

As if endowed with new strength and will, the young man spurred this way and that, dealing death on every side. The Apaches seemed determined to take him alive, for they refrained from shooting, all striving to drag him from his horse; but when the chambers of his rifle were empty; the barrel of the weapon crushed many a skull.

But the end was near.

The mounted Apaches now charged from the timber, and the gallant scout and the officer realized that they were doomed. The driver fell under the wheels, pierced through the heart by an arrow.

A score of painted fiends surrounded our hero, and he was clutched in the iron grasp of

many hands; his clothing was torn from his body to the waist, and a scalping-knife thrust into his shoulder by a brave, whom he struck in the face with his fist.

Lieutenant Warrington was also dragged from the ambulance. The mules were shot dead. While poor Winnie, watching all this, knelt horror-stricken in the vehicle, seeing plainly what was in store for her.

As Lionel Lacrosse was dragged past the ambulance, he called out to the terrified girl:

"Winnie Warrington! I will save you, if God will favor me that far. Pray for His protection!"

She heard this. She saw him. But he was gone. Dragged, perhaps, to torture; to a terrible death!

At this moment, the agonized maiden felt a grip upon her arm.

She turned quickly.

The hand that grasped her was red—red with blood; while, above it, was a hideous paint-smearred face, with horrible eyes that glittered fiendishly when they met her own.

A terrible scar, from temple to mouth, evidently made by a knife in some hand-to-hand encounter, and left free from paint, caused the savage to appear more than simply horrible.

A devilish smile, revealing his beast-like teeth, increased rather than modified the diabolical appearance of the savage; and poor Winnie, as she gazed, observing all this, in an instant realized in whose power she was.

Who had not heard of this merciless murderer of innocent babes, and torturer of helpless women?

The totem on his breast revealed his identity, even without that terrible scar.

Like a flash it came upon Winnie Warrington.

Her arm was grasped by the blood-stained hand, and her brain horrified by the gloating gaze of the most pitiless savage in America.

It was Lone Wolf, the Apache chief!

"Waugh!" came from the repulsive lips. "Sun gone in plain, but leave shine in white squaw's hair. Mebbe so squaw come from big sun. Mebbe so squaw Good Medicine. Sun-Hair, heap brave."

"Come, my warriors, how! Heap braves give death-yell. Mebbe so want Sun-Hair's scalp. White chief with black mustang, he heap brave. He shoot heap fast, but die slow. Tie up in prairie-dog village. Heap snakes in village. Snake bite. Swell up. Want water. Lips crack. Sun hot. Head hot. Call on Great Spirit. Then white chief he die. Waugh! Vamos!"

Ambiguous as were the words of Lone Wolf, Winnie understood that Lionel was to be bound in the midst of a prairie-dog town, a place that swarmed with rattlesnakes—that there, tortured by thirst and hunger, the hot sun blazing down upon his unprotected head and naked, wounded breast, he was to die a horrible, lingering death.

And she herself? She dared not even think of the fate that must await her.

As the repulsive savage drew her toward him from the ambulance, the night now filled with most horrible howls from the ford, the poor maiden's agonized, overtaxed brain gave way; and, with the cry:

"Oh, Father in Heaven! Protect me, save me!" she fell forward, senseless, over the seat of the ambulance.

There she lay, her long golden hair hanging in thick and wavy masses down upon the dead mules, that lay, pierced with scores of arrows, still in harness!

CHAPTER XIV.

ON THE PRAIRIE.

THE Rio Concho has its source below the northeastern extremity of that most extensive and sterile plateau, known as the Llano Estacado, or Staked Plains; its northern branch flowing through saline deposits, and consequently its waters in that region are more than brackish—in fact, extremely salt.

The banks of the upper branch are, at places, entirely free from timber, or even bushes; but, as the river flows onward, there is a gradual change both in the waters and the banks, the former becoming less and less salt, and the latter more and more wooded, until, when one reaches a distance half-way between the source of the northern branch and the point where the Rio Concho contributes its waters to the Rio Colorado of Texas, there is quite an extensive bottom of towering trees,

thick underbrush, and a tangled network of vines.

Beyond the timber, north and south, on either side, are wide-spreading plains covered with luxuriant grass; over which roam countless herds of bison, or did at the time of which we write.

Herds of mustangs also jerked the grass from the sward with impatient motion, and an occasional toss of heads upward, to gaze over the plain, for the progressive Texan mustangers had invaded their haunts at times, to capture and condemn them to irksome slavery. And, in addition, the fierce Apache often swooped down upon them with his lasso in hand, from which few escaped, for this tribe are as cunning in approach, and as dexterous with their buffalo-skin ropes as are their neighbors, the Mexicans, over the Rio Guadalupe.

Proceeding on down the stream, the change still continues in the same ratio, until one finds himself in a perfect earthly paradise.

Here the black bear waddles through the timber in search of his coveted meal of honey, and the beast is not obliged to search long, as the virgin forest is interspersed with aged trees, which are easily made to topple to the earth, and in which the little gatherers of sweets deposit their treasures.

Deer and antelope run in vast herds, and as these animals come to drink the puma pounces upon them.

Wild turkeys roost in immense numbers on the verge of the timber, while smaller game is to be found on every side.

Flowers of every hue and fragrance bespangle the plains, and ornament the bushes and vines that strive seemingly to smother the lordly trees which sustain them.

Cacti, of the most hideous, and also of the most lovely forms, are found on all sides; indeed, it has been asserted by an exploring botanist, that, from the head waters of the Concho to its confluence with the Colorado, he had discovered not less than fifty different varieties of the cactus tribe.

At the time of which we speak, this region was almost a *terra incognita*; none except rangers, scouts, and mustangers having wandered far above Camp Johnston, with the exception of some scouting details from that military post.

Crossing the ford on the St. Louis and Santa Fe stage-trail, we travel a most beautiful stretch of country, among some of the best grazing land in Texas, until within twenty miles of the confluence of the Concho and Colorado.

Here the beauties of the prairie cease.

A half-day's easy ride north brings one to the Red Fork of the Colorado, which runs southeast to meet the Concho; and from that standpoint, twenty miles from the junction of these rivers, in a vast triangle thus formed, is a prairie-dog town.

One might as easily attempt to estimate the leaves of a pine forest, as to make an effort to ascertain the number of marmots, small and peculiar-looking rabbits, smaller and more peculiar owls, and rattlesnakes, that all inhabit the countless holes or burrows that are excavated by these dogs, in as regular a manner as the points of the squares on a chess-board.

This extensive city is thickly populated with a variety of innocent, intelligent, and loathsome specimens of natural history; quadruped, bird, and reptile, all dwelling together in the same burrow.

The prairie-dogs keep a guard posted on the outskirts of their town, and congregate at times in large numbers, at some particular point, seeming to hold political caucuses.

These guards, at the approach of man, give out little sharp barks of warning, and the marmots within the line dash into their holes, those on duty maintaining their positions, brave and defiant, until one gallops very near to them, when, with a parting bark, they disappear into the bowels of the earth.

These dogs, as we have said, are the sole owners of the burg; but the rattlesnake, the owl, and the rabbit all board and lodge with him.

Instances, indeed, have been known, when the intruding "rattler" swallowed his landlord, when he happened to call about meal-time.

The owls sit on the little hillocks of earth, thrown up by the excavation, and wink and blink at the rabbits; both these last being smaller than, and quite different from, the specimens with which we are acquainted.

Beyond this peculiar city, the point of land between the two rivers is covered with heavy timber for fully a mile; and the bottom of either stream, beyond this timber west, has a clear space of rich grass, level as a floor, which extends a quarter of a mile before the burrows of the marmots begin.

From this description of the lay of the land, it will be seen that the point was a most isolated spot, and well guarded from approach.

This fact had been noticed and taken advantage of; for, just within the cover of the timber, at the extreme point of the triangle, and entirely screened from view from the two rivers, stood a log cabin, small, but strongly built, but having no veranda, as it stood within perpetual shade.

The sides and ends of this dwelling were pierced for rifles, there being but one door and a window at each end, both of which were furnished with thick oaken shutters.

The roof was formed of long cedar shingles, and at the back of the cabin was a rude chimney, constructed of sticks and mud.

Taken altogether, it was a most solitary and somber place to locate; more befitting a horse-thief, or a border bandit than an honest man.

However, considering the dangers of this section of country, such a place would naturally be chosen by any man who was willing to reside so far from civilization; but there was certainly no opening in such a place to gain a livelihood, except by hunting and fishing, for the dog-town debarred one from the grazing of stock, a business which, besides, could not be followed on account of the Indians.

About the same time that Lionel Lacrosse charged desperately down into the ford, to save, if possible, Winnie Warrington and her uncle from death, there was a one-eyed, wrinkled man, clad in buckskin, halting on the opposite side of the Concho from the lone cabin. As he sprang from his lean horse, he proceeded on hands and knees, to examine carefully the sward.

Single-Eye and Skip-lively were on the trail, both of the real and the imputed assassin of Captain Warrington. He had sworn to hunt the first to his death, and to return the last to his friends, and the scenes of his childhood.

"Dang my cats, Skip!" muttered the old scout; "thar's heaps o' 'sign' hyer-a-ways, but 'tain't 'tall fresh; an' I c'u'dn't take a afferdavy thet I hes struck the right trail ag'in. Ef Blackbird warn't ther boss keerd in ther game when ther Fort Clark hearse went through fer all she war wo'th, an' three pilgrims laid out stiff, I'm a-chawin' centerpedes fer three moons ter come!"

"Ther cantankerous cuss hes gi'n me a hefty ole time o' hit, since I slipped ther trail o' Lionel, what's lost his h'ar afore this, I reckon.

"Howsomever, ef he's a-lingerin' on this hyer big ball o' dirt, I'll find him, er dig my t'other eye out. Jack Hodge swore hit were Blackbird what went through his coach, an' thet he rid ther biggest and bestest nag in ther crowd; an' I hes follered thet cussed critter's huff-sign ontill my ole eye kinder goes back on me.

"He war p'inted up ther Colorado, an' I'm inclernated ter s'pose he 'caches' hisself purty nigh hyer. He didn't glide up Conebo, an' thet goes ter prove thet ther cuss tuck ter ther drink.

"Come, Skip, an' gi'n yer ole bones a soak. We'll skute t'other side, an' 'vestergate."

Rising to his feet as he said this, Single-Eye stepped to the side of his horse, mounted, and urged his beast into the stream; first securing his belt of weapons about him, and holding his rifle over his shoulder.

The odd-looking pair glided slowly through the waters, Skip-lively soon stumbling up the bank into the dense undergrowth, when the old scout dismounted, saying:

"Skip, jist freeze yer huffs right thar, ontill I shows up ag'in! This air skittish biz, an' I mought git jumped by ther hellyuns. Daug'd ef they moughtn't be a-layin' fer me, an' not gi'n me a show ter git in a extry wink afore gittin' a lead pill through ther bestest part o' my breathin' er disgestin'. So-long, Skip!"

With this parting admonition to his horse, the animal appearing to comprehend every word, the scout stealthily made his way through the thicket, pausing on the margin of the same, and peering out.

"Wh-e-e-er!" burst from the Single-Eye's lips, in the utmost astonishment and satisfac-

tion, as he caught sight of the solitary cabin in that far-away wilderness.

"Dog-gone my gran'marm's back-ha'r, ef I hesn't slumped right in on ther Blackbird's lay-out! An' a cosey locate hit air, fer a fac'! I'll go easy, though I doesn't s'pect they're ter hum, by ther look o' things."

By a circuitous route, the old scout stole to the rear of the cabin, up to its very walls, peeping through one of the loop-holes, and listening most intently.

But a moment stood he thus; for being now positive that no human beings were in the dwelling or near it, he proceeded to inspect the ground, muttering, as he returned to his horse:

"Skip, we-'uns hes foun' whar ther hellyuns caches the'selves when they lays off; but they hes glided on bleed biz somewhar, so we must hump ourselves an' find thar trail.

"They hes left 'sign' over ther drink somewhar, an' dang my eye ef I doesn't strike hit afore sunset!"

The next moment horse and man were again in the river, and the scout urged Skip-lively out from the timber, and rode up the edge of it for some distance. Leaving his horse, he proceeded, half bent, directly over the open plain, his gaze bent piercingly upon the ground.

For fifty yards he went on, and then, falling upon hands and knees, he crawled for some distance on a course parallel with the Concho toward the west.

Suddenly he stopped, gazed for an instant toward the horse, which had been watching his every movement, and then threw himself upon the ground, tearing up the grass as if he had been suddenly seized with spasms.

At last he sat up on the plain and gave a low whistle, which caused Skip-lively to advance toward him, though in a hesitating way.

"Dog-gone ther hull Lone Star State, with ther Staked Plains an' 'Pache Mountings counted in! Ef I hesn't struck Lionel's trail, I hopes ter hev my head skinned by a Piute papoose!"

"Come hyer, an' chaw one o' my ears off—ther one on my good-eye side, ter balance my ole head, what's a-gittin' light, lop sided an' flighty!"

"I'm a-b'ilin' over wi' pure glad, an' I'd gi'n a poun' o' terback, ef I hed hit, ter hev a real ole be-mule laugh, lastin' 'bout a hour. Dang hit, Skip, we're hunk! Ther trail air fresh. Ther boy air a-ridin' ther same black critter; an' we'll slip Blackbird's lay-out, find Lionel, an' then come down on thet cut-throat cache like a thousand o' bowlders from ther 'Pache Mountings in a thunder-storm!"

"Come up hyer, Skip, an' 'low me ter crawl yer. I'm es weak an' sick es a chicken wi' ther pip.

"Whoop-eel! Chris Corlumbus! Wouldn't I like ter gi'n a couple o' yells! Skute fer kiver, Skip, an' then, up ther drink, pickin' up huffs peart-like an' lively."

And into the shades the old scout rode—the man and beast, each so like the other—and then, on up toward the ford; the rider little dreaming that the man he loved so well and had sought so earnestly for so many long months, was, at that very moment, battling madly with a horde of war-painted Apaches.

CHAPTER XV.

AMONG THE BLACKBIRDS.

LONE WOLF was not the only one who had decided to lie in wait for the stage from Fort Belknap; and the Apache chief and his competitor in the business must have formed their plans at nearly the same time, although choosing different points for the attack.

Previous to the ambulance and escort having crossed the Colorado Ford, thirty miles north of the Concho, the scene of the Indian ambush, a party of four desperate, ruffianly-appearing white men dashed up the river through the timber toward the stage-road, and dismounted within the dense thickets near the crossing.

All were roughly appareled in rudely-made buckskin leggins, and blue woolen shirts, much the worse for wear; but each was armed with revolver, rifle and bowie.

Crime was stamped upon their dissipated faces, and shone plainly in their treacherous eyes.

Their attire proved them to have absented themselves from the settlements for some time; but, rough, soiled and ragged though it was,

the horses of all were noble animals, marked for speed and for endurance.

No one, who traversed the frontiers and met these men, would be apt to class them as scouts, rangers, or rancheros; but would at once, were they in the least versed in reading men's characters, decide that they were outlaws—desperate border bandits.

Nor would they be mistaken, for such indeed the men were.

One of them, who seemed to control his companions, and who, from appearance, manner, and words, was far superior to them in intelligence and education, as well as in strength of will, was one, the mere appearance of whom would cause a feeling of repulsion and abhorrence in any honest man who might chance to be brought face to face with him.

His hair, mustache, goatee, eyebrows, and small, piercing eyes were jet-black; the latter, ever darting suspicious looks here and there, were most treacherous in expression.

He had a desperate look and manner, like that of a hunted man who expects or knows that an ignominious death awaits him when captured; and notwithstanding his rough attire, and his presence so far from civilization, those who had met him at any time within the last few years, would at once recognize the man as Bird Blackwell, or "Blackbird," the dastardly assassin of Captain Warrington.

As these men dismounted, each opened his saddle-bags, and taking therefrom flasks of whisky, removed the corks with very evident relief and satisfaction.

"Here's success to our next venture, boys," said Blackbird. "I hope this bearse will pan out more wealth than the last, on the El Paso line, and that we shall all skin through without getting our skins broke."

"That Fort Clark venture was an unlucky scrape, and came near bursting the 'Blackbirds' all to flinders. Only four of us left, hang it! But we'll pick up some desperate pards down-country, next trip, I reckon."

"However, the less the number, the less to divide the plunder among. But, here goes! I'm as dry as a fish that's been jerked from its natural element by a hawk."

"Hyer's luck, Cap!"

"Down she goes!"

"Fun all 'round an' plenty o' rhino!"

All took what would be considered pretty "long" drinks, and then returned the flasks to their saddle-bags; rubbing their sleeves across their mouths and smacking their lips.

"Jim Ford," said Blackbird, with a smile, or rather an attempt at it, which caused him to appear more repulsive than ever; "cross the river, and leave your horse in the timber. Then strike out along the road, until you reach the edge of the bottom, where you can keep your eyes peeled for the 'hearse'. You can see it before it gets within miles of the Colorado, for the plain is as level as a floor."

"Keep close, for the driver carries a spy-glass; and report here as soon as you discover the stage. Be careful not to leave 'sign' at the come-out on the trail, on either side of the ford."

"All right, Cap. Reckon she'll be 'long soon, fer they changes nags t'other side ther Concho, jist a leetle arter sundown."

"Yes; I don't think you'll have long to wait. Hump yourself back lively when you get started; for we want to get fixed in such a position and manner as not to make a botch of this job, as we did at Fort Clark. Slip your bridles, boys! The horses can crop bottom grass, and we'll take a lay-down until Jim runs in on us with news of the hearse."

The latter directions were given after the departure of Jim, and but a moment or two passed before Captain Blackbird and his other two partners in crime were stretched out upon their backs, their sombreros pulled over their faces, all appearing greatly fatigued.

Jim forded the river, and proceeded along the stage road through the timber, which, at this point, extended fully half a mile from the river on its northern side. He soon arrived at the verge of the bottom, where he had a fine view of the stage-road toward Fort Chadbourne.

Although not aware of the fact, Jim was in the greatest danger when he approached this point; for, within the dense shades, crouched a dozen desperate demons, the sight of whom would have caused any beholder to shudder.

These men were evidently on the same business as were the Blackbirds; but they were,

although whites, a hundred times more degraded in their appearance.

They were of different nationalities and attire, some being deserters from the army, some depraved half-bloods of Mexico, and other outlaws from justice and society.

The torn and greasy uniforms of the deserters were patched with untanned deer-skin.

The buckskins of the desperadoes, both Mestizoes and fugitives from the settlements, were in as bad condition, all being rent and torn, and rudely patched.

Thus they appeared; the plain signs of hunger, shown in their glaring eyes and haggard faces, explained by the absence of rifles, which they had thrown aside as useless; they fearing to go into the settlements to obtain ammunition.

Jim, however, passed on toward the verge of the timber, closely observed by a crawling serpent, in the shape of one of the Mexican half-breeds.

The latter crept back to his companions, a look of relief upon his face as he explained in a low voice:

"Capitan Blackbird over river. Send man look for stage."

"How'd yer know Blackbird air over ther drink?" asked one of the outlaws quickly.

"Antonio see all in woods, when go to take Fort Clark stage. El Capitan want Antonio join him. Antonio say, come in one moon to Rio Concho. Antonio meet your boys, and say lead to Concho. It over there. Ride to ford in half-day."

"Good!" said the former speaker. "I'm dang'd glad we've struck nigh whar ther Blackbirds' nest air; but I don't agree ter let a chance slip fer gettin' grub an' powder. We-'uns must kerral thet hearse, an' cut the wizzens o' every dang'd human aboard o' her. I don't reckon we're goin' ter 'low ourselves ter be shot down like dogs, arter skinnin' through so long."

"Yer can't sw'ar, Antonio, thet Blackbird's gang air nigh hyer; an' ef they lees, they may be in es bad a fix es we-'uns, fer they didn't make ther rifle et ther Fort Clark hearse."

"We-'uns must gobble it this time, an' gi'n Cap Blackbird a leetle circus what'll surprise him, an' let him know we air up to snuff. What d'yer say, boyees?"

"We're not goin' ter 'low nobody ter come 'tween us an thet hearse," asserted another Texan.

"By thunder, that's the way to talk!" put in a deserter. "We're near Camp Johnston, and have to go that way to reach the junction of the Concho and Colorado, if we want easy travel."

"I don't advise going down the Colorado, and we must have arms and ammunition. There is sure to be some grub on board the stage."

The moment this decision had been reached by all the party, they again heard the clatter of hoofs, and Jim soon dashed down the trail toward the ford of the Colorado. All now felt sure that the coach was coming, and they eagerly stole through the undergrowth, and gazed over the plain.

But a short time elapsed when one of the deserters slunk back with a terrified face, exclaiming:

"That's not the coach, boys; it's a detachment of cavalry and an ambulance. We're in great danger."

All started into the timber, secreting themselves in a dense thicket, where a dozen or more horses were secured. They were soon, however, greatly relieved when the ambulance was heard rattling toward the ford, the clatter of hoofs being quickly lost in silence.

Then, and then only, did one of the wretches move; for they knew that the military escort would, if they discovered them, hunt them to death.

Fully another hour passed before the spy, who had returned to his post in the tree, reported that the stage was now coming beyond a doubt.

An inspection of the plain proved this report to be true, and preparations were instantly made for the dastardly attack.

To insure success, two of the outlaws climbed the trees and gained a position directly over the road where, screened by the foliage, they could remain until the coach was directly beneath them; then they had arranged to spring down upon it, and murder the driver or any "outside" who might be on the top.

Soon the heavy rumble of wheels warned them that the time for action approached, when

all braced themselves and strained every nerve for the cowardly attack.

But a few minutes passed, when six horses came dashing around a curve in the road, and then the coach with but the driver in view.

A moment after, and with demoniac yells the desperate, half-famished outlaws carried out their pre arranged programme to the letter.

Those in advance, bounding from the thicket, clutched the leaders and wheelers, and at the same moment the two in the tree dropped upon the coach-top, one grasping the driver and pulling him over backward, the other driving his knife to the hilt in the horrified and dumfounded man's heart.

Others, with desperate rush, sprung to the coach, jerked open the doors, and bounded in among the dazed passengers, dealing death on all sides with their knives.

Piercing shrieks of horror and agony, mingled with victorious yells from murder-maddened lips and the snorting and tramping of horses, rung out upon the air. This was for a moment. Then all was comparatively still. Not one of the occupants of the stage was alive.

Then followed a mad struggle, as all began the search in frantic haste for food. Some baskets and bundles of lunch were discovered, and the contents were devoured after the manner of famished wolves by the murderers. Flasks of liquor were also discovered, to the mad delight of all, and they were drained without restraint or prudence.

After this, the bodies were searched and robbed. Then, at a suggestion from one who had been the leading spirit of the gang, the driver was secured in his seat, the apron being buckled around his limbs, and a bar of wood run down his back, about which his handkerchief was bound, to keep him in a natural position.

Those in the coach were placed in such a manner that their blood-stained faces were at the open windows, their sightless eyes looking out.

This done, two-thirds of the outlaws crawled into the forward and hind boots, and into the coach among the dead, all concealing themselves from view; swearing to their comrades who remained behind to lead the horses to the ford, that—

"They would play a high old game on the 'Blackbirds' beyond the ford."

All were now ready. The reins were tied loosely in the hands of the dead driver, and the horses were released, springing forward at first very rapidly, but soon falling into their usual gait.

And on went the corpse-laden, blood-dripping "hearse"—thus, as often on the border, most appropriately named—with the murderers crouched at the feet of their victims, maddened by blood, frenzy, and unusual indulgence in drink.

Thus on, toward the Colorado ford.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE OLD SCOUT ON THE TRAIL.

SINGLE-EYE and Skip-lively proceeded up the Rio Concho, keeping within the timber; as the scout was well aware that in his present locality, he could not travel on the open plain without danger of being discovered by roving bands of Apaches. The moonlight was now sufficient to guide him, while the instinct of his horse aided much in selecting the clearest of the paths made by mustang and buffalo.

And now, it was with much satisfaction that Single-Eye recalled the fact that he had spent so much of his time at Lacrosse Ranch, and around camp-fires, explaining the habits and modes of warfare of the Apaches to Lionel.

When the old scout discovered the, to him, unmistakable trail of the black horse, he was astonished to a degree that equaled his great relief and joy; for he had long since given up all hope of ever again seeing Lionel. He believed the young planter to have been captured, and either tortured or slain outright by the Indians; as he had followed his trail from Lacrosse Ranch to the canyon, and there detected the evidences of the desperate charge he had made through the Apaches.

The very fact that the young man had been so reckless and daring, went far to convince Single-Eye that he must be dead; for he could not hope to repeat such a desperate dash with like results, and he felt sure that the Indians, infuriated at their loss through the white brave, would follow him like blood-hounds.

He had now, however, to his great relief, convincing proof that Lionel lived. He felt, too, like another man, since he had discovered the haunt of Blackbird.

Had the old scout forded the Concho and climbed a tree on the border of the timber on the northern side of the river, he would have been able to see a terrible sight, far out in the great dog-town—a sight that would have put an end to his further advance up-stream—for the very man who ruled his mind was then and there being tortured.

The old scout could not have recognized Lionel at such a distance; but he would, nevertheless, have spurred at headlong speed to save any white man, and besides he would soon have fixed, from the trail, the man's identity.

But this was not to be. The young planter was fated to suffer this untold agony; and he longing at the same time to rescue Winnie Warrington, and failing in that, praying earnestly for death.

On went Single-Eye, without the guardian angel of Lionel Lacrosse having fluttered in his face and swerved him from his course over the Concho, toward the north, to cut loose that strong man from the agony that racked his iron frame, and caused him to question the justice of his Creator.

It was midnight when Single-Eye reached the vicinity of the ford. He was too experienced a prairie-man to approach a crossing-place at a stream on the frontier, other than in a stealthy manner.

Consequently, he left Skip-lively nibbling daintily at the buds and green twigs, forgetting not his usual muttered admonitions of caution, and approached, in a cat-like manner, the ford.

A very slight movement in his front warned the old scout that something living, beast or human, was in his path.

Drawing his huge bowie, and holding the blade between his teeth, Single-Eye dropped noiselessly upon his hands and knees, and crept toward a large tree between himself and the point whence the thing, whatever it might be, had betrayed its presence.

Upon reaching the tree, he arose to his feet, and peeped cautiously toward the ford.

He had now a clear view of the silvery waters of the Concho, here gliding eastward.

The old scout, of a sudden, was forced to dodge his head behind the tree, and close his solitary optic, pressing his finger hard upon the lid; for the bright waters blinded him, and rendered it impossible for him to scan the darker shades near at hand.

Pulling his sombrero brim down, as a shield to his eye, he shot glances about the edge of the bank toward the ford; and his apprehensions for the safety of Lionel were now increased, for not ten paces from his position, sat a hideous Apache brave, watching the trails down into the ford on both sides, as if expecting the arrival of an enemy. Single-Eye's mind was made up.

The Apache must die!

This brave had been left, or sent, to watch the ford, his position showing that he was alone, or he would not be forced to jerk his head from one point to the other to view the trail on either side.

The back of the Indian was toward the scout, which was a great advantage. Single-Eye made but two bounds from the tree-trunk. Quickly grasping the hair of the brave in his left hand, he jerked the same backward. The wide-open mouth strove to give out a yell, but the unnatural position prevented it.

Only for an instant flashed the black eyes into that of his foe; then the blade of the scout was buried to the hilt in the broad, painted breast.

High in air sprung the Apache, his terrible death-bowl forced back by the old scout, who thrust the brim of his sombrero into the red-skin's mouth, and then quickly jerked out the bowie.

There was but a short struggle, followed by a heavy fall, and then a grunt of exultation from Single-Eye. By a dexterous slash or two, and a strong pull, the reeking scalp was torn from the head of the dead brave; and the old scout, feeling confident that no more red spies were near the ford, gave a low whistle, his signal to Skip-lively, and the horse soon approached the tree stealthily.

"Thar's another condemned skunk of a 'Pache tuck a lively skute ter Injun kingdom come, Skip. Chalk another fer Single-Eye—red chalk, remember that. Dang my cats ef

ther red bellyun hain't got a six-shooter an' a bowie-knife enter him!"

The horse sniffed the air toward the corpse, and then shook its head in seeming disgust, which caused Single-Eye to shake with suppressed laughter.

"Dang my cats, Skip! I b'lieve yer does hate a 'Pache 'bout equil ter yer ole master, an' I doesn't blame yer; but kinder skute down ter ther drink now, an' I'll 'zamine things 'bout ther ford. I must see what sort o' 'sign' air layin' 'roun' loose on ther trail this side, an' then we'll levant."

With these words to his horse, the old scout strode from the bushes into the stage-road, where he discovered plain "sign," and enough to fill him with horror and apprehension.

No sooner did he step into the road than he knew that a large war-party of Indians had but recently been there; also a Government ambulance, which had crossed the Concho coming from the north. This last he soon saw, up the trail, the dead mules still in harness.

From the fact that the vehicle had not been burned, the scout knew that the Indians had feared an advance of troops from Camp Johnston.

Several small shreds of silk, with a bow of ribbon, and a tiny five-pointed gold star with a diamond in its center, were picked up by Single-Eye, indicating that a woman had been dragged from the ambulance over the dead mules, her dress catching and tearing on the iron-work.

A strip of gold braid, also, was pulled by the old scout from a cross-piece in the side of the ambulance. These showed plainly that an officer and a lady had been captured, and that probably their escort had been murdered by the Apaches, who had ambushed them at the ford.

The slain soldiers, some of whose bodies had been washed upon shallow banks, now lay in plain view, down-stream, horribly mutilated; which, when the old scout perceived, he regretted greatly that he had not arrived in time to take a part in the conflict.

It was a difficult matter now to decide where the young planter could be. Lionel had not been killed; for, if so, his body would be found on the south bank, the scene of the most hotly contested part of the fight. If not captured, Single-Eye reasoned, Lionel would have gone to the station for assistance, and followed the Apaches.

This was plainly evident, therefore. The young ranchero was either dead, or, a captive. If dead, he would find his body in the morning, as it might have been thrown into the stream.

Being on the north bank of the Concho, the scout determined to ascertain if the war-party had followed the road to the timber edge, and then turned west over the plain.

He therefore galloped away from the ford, through the bottom, when, as he cleared the wood, and the moon illuminated the trail, fresh "sign," that had been left since the ambulance and escort had passed toward the ford, caught his eye.

Springing to the earth, he examined every footprint, giving an exclamation of extreme anguish and apprehension.

There could be no mistake.

It was as plain as a printed book.

Lionel Lacrosse was a captive!

He was being forced along; his heel-prints showing that he had held back while thus dragged; he had, in the midst of a horde of Apaches, passed from the ford, through the timber, and along the road toward the north, until the open plain was reached. Then, on leaving the trail, over the prairie to the east, they had gone, toward the great dog-town between the Concho and the Colorado.

Quickly the old scout unbuckled the weapons that he had taken from the Indian he had slain, and examined them. It was the revolver and bowie of Lionel Lacrosse; and the hand of Single-Eye trembled, as he held them up to the moonlight, and recognized the ornamental work.

The scout knew, as well as if he had been there and seen them, the manner and movements of the party.

He also knew that the Apaches had dragged the young ranchero thus, to condemn him to a lingering death, and that in some manner unknown—yes, beyond his conception. Knowing this, he suffered great torture himself; the moments seeming hours, as he crouched in the

woods, with Skip-lively by his side, waiting for the dawn to light him on the trail, over the dry and grass grown plain.

But he had little hope of ever seeing Lionel Lacrosse alive.

CHAPTER XVII.

OUT OF THE JAWS OF DEATH.

DOOMED to die ten thousand deaths—doomed, in the strength and pride of young manhood, to suffer the tortures of the lost, while yet on earth!

Bound like a dog, his iron frame and sinews of steel weakening by degrees; upheld only by raw-hide ropes that cut into his flesh, causing his hands to become benumbed, and as devoid of sense and feeling as if amputated.

His tongue was swollen, his lips parched with terrible thirst, and an insane longing for the far-away serpentine line of dark-green, that he knows screens the cool, rolling waters of the Rio Concho.

The dread night has passed, and Lionel Lacrosse still clings to life.

It had been a night to cause one's hair to turn to gray. A night, the memory of which would be ever stamped upon his brain, should he live through it, and by some miraculous means be rescued from his awful position.

Deserted by God and man!

Left bound by demons in the shape of men, devoid of all mercy—all humanity!

His brain, tortured by the consciousness that the angelic being whom he loved more than life, and who previous to his being plunged into this torture had transported him to the seventh heaven of delight by confessing her interest and faith in him—yes, he has been filled with the frenzy of madness to know that she is in the power of the demons who have bound him thus!

The coyotes have yelled their noisy concert, and he has expected the black wolf's howl—has looked for the long fangs of this dread beast to tear his limbs. But the night has passed, and long and horrible as it has been, he regrets that it has gone.

The blazing sun, now risen, shoots its hot rays into his very soul, causing his brain to seem like molten lead swimming within his bursting skull.

He feels what seems the hot breath of flames upon his cheek, and he seems to hear the rippling splash of waters over a noisy brook-bed; while the scent of flowers that bloom at his childhood's home on the Salado are filling the hazy atmosphere, only to increase his agony ten-fold when realities return.

"Can it be? Oh, my God! that Thou hast forsaken me?"

The words seem hardly human in intonation, gurglingly, chokingly, as they come forth.

In hopeless anguish, the eyes drop; the strong frame quivers; the lids, heretofore rigid, droop over the glaring eyeballs that mirror the agonized, suffering soul, that seems struggling to leave the body. Life and death are in most fierce conflict, the latter seeming to conquer; for, listless, the head falls forward, the body that writhed and contorted in agony, ceased to move, the eyes that sought to pierce the sky and seek the mercy denied on earth quietly closed.

Out from the tens of thousands of holes the prairie-dogs have crawled, long ere the sun has streaked the east with gray, to crop the dew-laden grass, and as the day dawned and revealed the strange object in their town, one after another they have darted back, with barks of alarm, into the earth.

As the sun rises higher and the air becomes hotter, slowly out from the marmot holes, the repulsive rattle-snakes draw their length along, lying outstretched, of all sizes and ages, needing but a sound foreign to the town to coil for deadly spring, their horrible rattle filling the air.

And thus hangs Lionel Lacrosse, among the swarming myriads of owls, snakes, rabbits and marmots, his senses for the time having providentially left him.

Will he again awaken to consciousness?

Awaken to suffer ten times more excruciating anguish; awaken to pray for death, his intense sufferings banishing all thoughts of everything else on earth, even of Winnie Warrington?

Far better that his breath should leave him now than that he should awaken again to see the soaring red-jowled buzzards, high up in the brazen sky, waiting for his dissolution—turn-

ing their heads sideways and gazing gloatingly down upon their expectant feast.

But more repulsive, more horrible is the sight below that will meet his vision, should it return.

The spasmodic struggles, which he cannot control, will cause the pole to fall to the earth, and then, while yet alive, those fearful reptiles will crawl upon and over him, and if he moves, will dart their fangs into his flesh.

No hope on any side, above or below!

Death is in the very air—a horrible death!

Well may he cry out, from his inmost soul:

"God and man have forsaken me!"

Again the flesh and muscles of the tortured man quiver, his eyelids tremble and slowly open. He writhes and struggles, his eyes blazing as if awakened from a fearful dream.

Once again he strives to cry out, but his tongue refuses to articulate, and the blood bursts from cracked lips and wounds.

He runs out his swollen tongue with insane avidity, and laps the blood from his lips. This gives momentary relief, and enables him to speak—to frame a few brief words of prayer:

"Give me life or death! Send me succor or take me out of misery! My cross is greater than I can bear!"

To hear those piteous cries would have almost caused a statue to weep.

And that prayer, so oft repeated, was heard.

A clattering of hoofs comes from the west, and on toward the tortured being so near his death.

On, in ungainly gait but with far-reaching bounds, speeding over the ground, spurning the marionets and causing the stones to fly beneath his huge hoofs, regardless of the dangerous holes into which the dogs dart with yelps of surprise and fear—on comes Skip-lively!

Single-Eye lashes and spurs, as if life and death depended upon a single bound of his horse, as indeed was the case; and, as he reaches favorable distance, fills the air with yells and whoops of cheer. They reach the ears of the sufferer. A hopeful expression pushes forward through the pictured misery on his face, and he turns his head slowly. Then, as the well-known forms of the old scout and his steed are recognized, Lionel feels that he is saved, and that there is hope yet for Winnie Warrington!

The change from despair to a consciousness of release from his terrible sufferings—as it were from death to life—was so sudden, so overpowering, that again the young man became senseless; his head fell forward, and his lids closed over the sightless eyes.

Up to the wagon-tongue thundered Single-Eye, his horse snorting at every breath, and panting laboriously, covered with foam from head to tail. On he came, crushing the snakes beneath his fast flying hoofs; while, all around the air was filled with the short, sharp barks of thousands of marmots, and the blood-curdling rattle of thousands of snakes!

"Dog gone my great gran' marm's forty-second cousin's tom-cat! Skip-lively, hyer we bees, an' we ain't a minit too soon, I sw'ar!"

"By ther r'arin', tearin'; jumpin' Jerusalem, an' Gee-bossifat counted in, ef thet ain't a sight ter make a white man take a afferdavy ter skin every red heathun in ther 'Nited States an' Terrortories, from head ter heel! Ef I doesn't feel like doin' bit, I'll crowd down Terrantalers fer grub, fer ther nex' six moons, without salt er pickin' off legs, er singin'! Dod-gast my ole heart, ef thar war any juice inter me, I'd bu'st right out in a howlin' ole le ory!"

"Howsomever, I'll wait until some other time, when thar ain't quite so much biz on hand."

"Dang'd ef Lionel warn't nigh glidin' inter kingdom come, an' ef he hedn't gone straight through. I wouldn't bet on no white an' squar' man ag'in; no matter what all ther Haller-looyer biz 'mong the Gospel slingers may 'mount ter! Ease up a leetle, Skip! Thar—thet's O. K."

While thus speaking, as usual, to his horse, the old scout had been by no means idle.

Knowing that he could not lift Lionel upon Skip-lively, if cut down and allowed to drop to the ground, Single-Eye again guided the animal close up to the perpendicular wagon-tongue, severed the ropes that bound his ankles, and then lifted the legs of the senseless

man up over the saddle, springing up behind the cante himself.

This done, the scout, with one arm about Lionel's body under his arms, reached up and cut the lariats that secured the wrists of the sufferer, by a powerful effort; sustaining the young ranchero until the latter was seated upon the saddle, and reclining upon the left arm of his rescuer.

No sign of returning consciousness was yet manifested, and Single-Eye tore loose his canteen, drew out the cork with his teeth, and poured water into the mouth, and over the head, face, and breast, indeed over the whole body of the unfortunate sufferer. He then urged Skip-lively in an eastward direction, saying in explanation to the horse:

"Git fer ther lay-out we foun' las' night, Skip! I doesn't keer ef Blackbird's hull gang air thar. I'm a-goin' ter git Lionel inter that cabin, an' nuss him back ter Texas. Then, dang my ole heart, ef we doesn't hunt ha'r, I'm a howlin' liar!"

"Ef ther dang'd Blackbird comes floppin' roun', I'll fill him chuck full o' lead, er carve him with my slasher, whichever he's inclined toward."

"I hope ter be hashed, my meat wrapped up in shucks with chile, an' sold on ther Alamo Plaza fer termarlars, ef I doesn't!"

"Poor Lionel! Gerushe Gerry-ko! Won't he salerwate an' scarify ther reds on ther hull-sale arter this?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

SUN-HAIR.

THE words of Lone Wolf, spoken to Winnie Warrington, proved that he had fully decided upon the fate of Lionel; and, from directions given to some of his braves, as Lieutenant Warrington was overpowered and dragged from the ambulance, it was plain that his mind was made up as regards him also. The latter was at once bound upon a horse, and, guarded by half a dozen braves, was hurried up the Rio Concho, the party keeping within the timber.

Near the ford was the wreck of a Government wagon; and, after ordering poor Winnie, who was still senseless, to be bound and kept in the undergrowth, secreted until his return, half of the survivors of the war party, headed by Lone Wolf, and with Lionel in their midst, crossed the river and the belt of timber on the north bank, and turned eastward for three miles to the place at which their horses had been left.

The chief had directed one of his warriors to bring the tongue of the wrecked wagon along; and when their mustangs were reached, the captive was mounted upon one of them, when all sprung into their saddles and galloped at full speed to the edge of the dog-town we have described.

Here he was left, in the manner we have seen, and when the braves returned to the ford, all was silent as death.

Winnie, who had by this time recovered, was now bound upon a horse, and, with horror in her blue eyes, and terror contorting her face, was hurried to the eastward.

Lone Wolf lingered behind to post a single spy, to whom he gave the arms that had been taken from Lionel, with orders to kill any scout or soldier who might come down the trail from the north.

Having taken this precaution, the Apache chief galloped along the buffalo-trail to overtake his braves and their beautiful captive.

He had but just returned to the Concho from a raid down through the border settlements, and had dispatched a large number of his warriors, by a more southerly route, to the Rio Pecos with their plunder, his object being to ambush the stage, and then to spread his daring and renown as a chief among the Comanches, his most hated enemies outside of the whites.

This last disaster, and the many deaths among his party, however, maddened him. But the capture of a United States officer was a great thing, and he resolved to torture him upon arriving at their village; for he deemed the lieutenant of more importance than a dozen such men as he had left to die in the dog-town, and that, although Lionel had been highly honored in the mode of death selected for him—none but cowards being brained upon the spot.

The young ranchero had proved himself a great brave, and was thus given the privilege of a death that would tax his fortitude to the utmost.

So on they hurried toward the Rio Pecos, be-

yond which towered the scoria-like mountains of Apache-land.

The agony now suffered by Winnie Warrington was far beyond one's power to conceive.

The interest which she had from the first felt in the handsome young planter had given way to a strong sympathy for him, when she saw him suffering from the unreasoning injustice of her father.

Then came the fearful shock, when all seemed convinced that her loved, though misguided, parent had fallen by the hand of the man he had insulted. Surely that could not be. Then, when Single-Eye appeared upon the scene, and asserted that his friend Lionel, who had fled with this terrible charge resting upon him, was not the guilty party—giving proofs, too, of what he asserted—the heaviest of the load that oppressed her was removed.

But Lionel had gone. Fled to the wilderness, ignorant that his innocence had been established, and obliged to leave his beloved and only parent to be buried by strangers; then, again, Winnie's anguish became almost unbearable.

She often pictured her lover, for so she considered him, though no word of love had passed between them, as being tortured somewhere by the same red fiends who had slain and mutilated his aged father.

She had often recalled as well, the evident infatuation that Bird Blackwell had not striven to conceal for herself; and now remembered the glances of hate she had seen him cast at Lionel.

This explained the object the cowardly wretch had in view when he shot her father, with the intention of fastening the fiendish crime upon the man whom he deemed his rival. And this he would have successfully accomplished, had it not been for the opportune arrival of Single-Eye.

She had dispatched friends to look for the old scout, with a view of securing his services to go in search of Lionel; but Single-Eye had departed from the burning ranch, no one knew whither.

At last, the life that the poor girl led on Salado Creek became irksome. Hopeless of Lionel's return, and eventually inclined like all others to believe him dead, she resolved to join her uncle at Fort Mason, hoping still against hope, that something might be learned of the wanderer, if she went to the frontiers.

But nothing was known of Lionel Lacrosse by the officers, soldiers, or scouts at the post; and Winnie was far from being displeased when her uncle received orders to report at Franklin; he also bearing dispatches to the commanders of forts and stations along the route, in regard to movements to be made against the hostile tribes, who had of late committed many depredations.

When the fierce war-painted Apaches sprung from their ambush, Winnie was horrified beyond the power of pen to describe.

Then, when she gazed up the steep bank, her attention attracted by the explosion of firearms, and saw the daring dash of the reckless rider, and recognized in him the man who was never absent from her mind and heart—first joy and relief, and then anguish and despair took possession of her. She felt that she would be forced to witness his brutal murder; forced to see the painted demons butcher him before her eyes!

But she resolved that, if he was to die, he should at least know that his innocence had been proven—that the real assassin of her father was known. It was no time for maidenly reserve. What if Lionel Lacrosse did see that she loved him! He had proved his love for her—proved it to the death—and he had a right to know, at such a moment as this, how she regarded him.

She saw the effect her words had upon him; but she saw him also, the next instant, torn from her sight. Her uncle also, had been captured.

Winnie felt sure that they were to be tortured. Death, then, would have been a mercy to herself; it would have been more than welcome.

Then, as Lone Wolf tauntingly explained to her the manner of the death of the white chief, as he called Lionel, she became senseless, falling forward over the seat of the ambulance, as has been already narrated.

Upon recovering her senses the poor girl found herself bound upon a horse and being hurried she knew not where.

She thought it not unlikely, however, that a body of troops would be dispatched on the trail from Camp Johnston to the rescue as soon as news of the massacre and capture reached the post.

But no soldiers had escaped, and the awful facts might not become known for some time, not perhaps until too late—until her uncle had been tortured to death, and she herself—but she dared not think of her own fate.

To drive thoughts of the dread doom that might await her from her mind, she began to picture the sufferings of Lionel, assisted in so doing by recalling the words of the Apache chief.

She could see him now, in all his anguish of mind and body, tortured with thirst and burning with fever, the beasts and serpents gathered around him and the loathsome buzzards soaring above his head, eager to tear his corpse, watching gloatingly for his death.

Thus the agonized maiden pictured him, and we have seen that imagination could scarce reach the reality of the scene.

Then she, too, as did Lionel at the same moment, cried out from her inmost soul:

"Oh, my God, Thou hast indeed forsaken me!"

CHAPTER XIX.

A PRACTICAL JOKE.

WHEN Jim returned to his companions, reporting to Captain Blackbird that the coach was coming in the distance, all sprung to their feet and tightened girths, while the bandit chief proceeded to select a favorable covert in which he could conceal himself and Jim, and also have, on the opposite side of the road, a like thicket for his other two followers.

When thus positioned, they had a long stretch of the north road within view, and through this vista they could also see the road at the decline into the stream, on the opposite bank from themselves. Consequently they were quite as much surprised and alarmed as had been the more desperate and murderous horde who were upon a like errand, on discovering that in place of its being the expected stage-coach, it was an ambulance with a cavalry escort.

"Deuce take you, Jim!" exclaimed the captain, angrily; "you came near getting us into a pretty kettle of fish. Here, confound you! lead my horse back into the woods. I can find a place where I can observe this party in safety."

Blackbird, as he spoke, dismounted, and passed his bridle-rein to the amazed Jim, who quickly disappeared. He then called out to his men on the opposite side of the road:

"Spur back, boys, into the timber. That is not the game we are hunting."

The two bandits needed no second command, but galloped fast through the undergrowth, the ambulance and escort being now in the river.

Blackbird had not long to wait in his new position, for soon the advance of the escort appeared above the steep incline. Then the ambulance and the rear guard, all going at a slow pace, came full in view.

It so chanced that Lieutenant Warrington was turned half-about in his seat, conversing with his niece, the latter leaning forward, greatly interested in what he was saying.

At the first glance Blackbird recognized the maiden, and the look of amazement on his face soon changed to one of jealous fury.

In his most selfish and unjust mind he imputed his present condition to her whom he had so foully wronged.

She had created so deep and ungovernable a passion in his breast that he had lost all reason, and in that state had committed the crime that had banished him from civilization, and forced him to lead the life of a border bandit.

Thus the wretch reasoned, repudiating his own entire responsibility for the crime and its consequences.

Now, as he again caught sight of the lovely face that had once ensnared him, there was a sudden transformation in his feelings as had occurred before; his former infatuation being as nothing to the passion that now consumed him, at discovering Winnie thus so closely intimate with a United States officer.

He madly resolved, on the instant, that, as she had driven him to his present wild life, she should share it with him.

That would take much of the curse of outlawry and solitude from him; and the mere

thought almost impelled him forward to seize and drag her from the ambulance.

Reflecting, the next instant, on the madness of such a proceeding, he kept his position, but with grating teeth and flashing eyes swearing that Winnie Warrington should yet be in his power.

It was one satisfaction to him to know that Lionel Lacrosse had not seen Winnie since the day of her father's murder; and Blackbird exulted in the knowledge, although knowing that he himself had been detected as the assassin. He had learned of the flight of Lionel, and of the destruction of his home by the Apaches; and all this gave the miscreant intense satisfaction.

He had, at times, been filled with no little dread, thinking that Lionel might be on the frontier, and that he might some time meet him. This fear had caused him to collect a band of lawless men, arm and equip them in Mexico, and by a free use of the money he had stolen from his father, gain their confidence and obedience.

But these men had nearly all been killed, or captured, in an attack on a mail coach near Fort Clark, which was filled with scouts and rangers, expressly in anticipation of it.

Blackbird now felt sure that the officer in the ambulance was en route for Franklin, on the Texas side of the Rio Grande, across from El Paso; as he had learned from one of his men that fresh troops had been ordered there to break up a band of Mexican bandits, and make incursion into Apache Land!

That the ambulance would make a short stop at Camp Johnston, he felt sure; and, had he but a dozen men, he would not hesitate to dash up the Concho, cut across the plain, and attack the escort at the Horse Head Crossing of the Pecos. He could easily have made his men believe that the officer was a paymaster going to the upper Rio Grande posts to pay off the troops; and thus induce them to go on such a hazardous expedition.

But he did not have the men, and he was furious when he thought that he had neglected to send a spy into Fort Clark, to ascertain the number and character of the occupants of the coach; a neglect which had proved the ruin of his band.

"Dang my skin, Cap Blackbird!" said Jim, who now crawled up, through the thicket; "I war mighty consarned 'bout yer, an' 'gun ter think ther sogers hed kerral'd yer."

"Not by a jug-full!" returned the bandit chief. "Lead up the nags, and then recall the boys, and station them as before; for they change horses about sundown at Camp Johnston. The ambulance and escort must have started long before the coach arrived at the upper station."

Jim departed on this errand, and Blackbird had recourse again to his whisky-flask; after which he walked across the road into the wood, and gave a low whistle. This was answered and the men, who had dashed into the woods at the appearance of the soldiers, came up, and took their stations as before.

They had but a little time to wait when the coach appeared; the horses dashing down the incline on the opposite side of the Colorado, into the ford.

Captain Blackbird and Jim sprung into their saddles instantly, the former crying out to his men on the opposite side of the road:

"Look sharp, boys! Attend to biz at the signal. One of you help Jim to stop the team, and the other draw bead on the driver. I'll attend to the insides. Don't make a botch of this biz now, for it's our last chance."

"All right, Cap! We're air ready fer ther jump an' shoot ef hits called fer."

"Don't shoot, unless to save our lives; for we know not who may bear the reports."

No further words were spoken, for again the rumble of wheels sounded, the horses having stopped to drink; the outlaws taking the precaution, before starting, to uncheck the animals.

Soon the team and stage appeared; the horses tugging up the steep bank to the south side of the ford; and with revolvers at full cock, tightly clutched in either hand, the road-agents made ready to dash from their covert, there being some ten feet clear space between them and the road.

The stage came on at speed, the horses tossing their heads and snorting, not yet being free from the fright occasioned by the late fearful encounter.

Soon they were nearly opposite the con-

cealed bandits, who, however, could not, when on the extreme edge of the thicket, inspect the coach.

"Break brush, boys!"

Thus yelled Captain Blackbird, as he spurred his horse from the thicket, and added, as he presented his revolver:

"Throw up your hands, or you are dead men!"

Jim and his companion opposite him caused their steeds to bound to the heads of the stage horses, and brought the same to halt, while the other bandit appeared at the west door of the coach at the same instant.

So also did Captain Blackbird; his partner, not only grasping the bridle-rein of the off wheeler, but leveling his revolver at the driver's head, while he repeated the order of his chief.

But no hands were upheld.

Then, as Blackbird again called out:

"Throw up your hands, or you are dead men," a peal of half-smothered, but most fiendish and most unnatural laughter burst from the coach.

This, coupled with the horrible sight that now met the view of the outlaw chief and his men, caused the very blood to curdle in their veins.

Never were men more completely dumfounded and horrified; for, from the coach windows, staring upon them with glassy, sightless eyes, and blood-stained, ghastly faces were naught but murdered men!

The driver himself, they perceived, was a corpse also; and as all fully realized this, the fiendish, unaccountable laughter froze the very blood in their veins.

With faces blanched, and eyes filled with horror, they drove spurs as one man, and dashed into the timber, each striving to keep near the others, while loud on the air in their rear rung hideous yells, and demoniac laughter afresh.

On they urged their already maddened animals, at every bound endangering their lives by their terrific speed, through the bottom timber; crashing through thickets and over piles of dead logs, all half-bent forward, not daring to look behind them, and insanely eager to increase the distance between themselves and the chariot of death—from the ghastly corpses with their sightless, staring eyes, and from the horrible, hellish laughter, that caused their hair to stand on end with superstitious terror, and to chill the very marrow in their bones!

CHAPTER XX.

FLIGHT OF THE BLACKBIRDS.

THE bandits spurred wildly in a course diagonal from the road and the river. Reason as they might, they could not solve the terrible mystery; first, in regard to the murder of the driver and passengers, and secondly, the unearthly yells and laughter.

They knew that the Indians were not the authors of this wholesale crime, as the victims were not scalped nor the horses taken from the coach, and they knew of no bandit band in the vicinity; besides this, they were well aware that no "road-agents" would kill either driver or passengers unless forced to do so to save their own lives, as troops would be sent out in all directions to hunt them to the death.

But here were six men and the driver, evidently murdered by knife-thrusts—a fact that in itself filled them with horror—and, when the peals of demon laughter greeted their ears, they expected next to see the bleeding corpses in hot pursuit of them.

It was not until clear of the timber and far out on the open plain that the outlaws halted and gazed apprehensively toward the Colorado.

Nothing met their view, however. The event of half an hour ago appeared more like an awful dream than a reality.

But a reality it was, as they all knew but too well. Captain Blackbird was the first to speak, but his voice surprised himself, so unnatural did it sound, and so difficult was it for him to articulate.

"Boys, the devil and all his imps are in that timber! I wouldn't ride up the stage-road and cross the ford of the Red Fork for all Texas."

"What in the fiend's name do you make of that bloody business?"

"Dang'd ef yer hain't got me whar my ha'r air short, Cap," replied Jim. "I'd give a heap ter fergit hit, but I'm dead sure I never shill. Dog gone me! I b'lieve hit's a warnin'!"

ter we-uns ter quit ther road an' turn ter religion. I'm p'ison sure I'll keep cl'ar o' thet locate hyerarter."

The other two men seemed too badly frightened to venture an opinion. All kept their eyes fixed on the back trail, and soon they saw bright flames shining through the timber, and showing more plainly as the sun had sunk below the horizon.

"If the fiends haven't started a little Hades on the Colorado, I'm a liar!" exclaimed the bandit chief.

"Boys, this locality don't suit me. Let us git up and git!"

"One thing air dang'd sure," put in Jim; "ther Blackbirds air mighty onlucky. Everything hes gone dead ag'in' us from ther word go; an' I reckon we'd better levant fer ther cabin, an' fish an' hunt fer grub, keepin' cl'ar o' thet cussed Colorado ford."

"That will suit me for a while," agreed Blackbird; "but I don't cross that dog-town by night, even if there is a full moon. We'll strike across the plain to the Concho ford and then down the stream to the cabin. If we could only surprise the camp of that escort, we would, I have no doubt, make a rich haul, as I believe it is the paymaster with money to pay off the up-country troops."

"Don't talk ter me 'bout surprisin' nothin'!" said Jim, dubiously and seriously.

"I've had enough o' thet ter last me a month o' Sundays. Them sogers 'u'd bore every one on us afore we c'u'd say, 'Now I lay me—'"

"I believe you are about right, Jim," said the bandit chief, as the hopeful quartette rode on over the plain; "we can't expect to do much with a military escort. Reckon we'll have to lay for small wagon-trains until we get as large a crowd as we first had."

Soon the dark line of timber that marked the course of the Rio Concho came in view, and Captain Blackbird jerked his horse to haunches, crying out:

"Look yonder, boys, and look lively! Then jump for dirt, or we shall be discovered!"

The men needed no second bidding. They gazed open-mouthed; Jim, at last, exclaiming:

"Wa-al, I sw'ar, Cap, I reckon we-uns air called fer! Hit's a passel o' red bellyuns, an' they're p'inted toward our cabin, goin' 'cross ther dog-town."

"Hit's ther fust time I ever see'd a 'Pache, or a Curmanach' offen his critter. What in thunder air a-comin' nex'! We-uns air cut off, north, south, an' east. Reckon we'll hev ter strike out fer ther Staked Plains."

Before Jim had ceased speaking, all four had dismounted, and allowed their horses to feed; which would render their discovery more doubtful.

Thus they remained for some time, not daring to advance, or to turn on their trail, until, to their still greater astonishment, they saw the Indians enter the timber, and reappear, mounted upon horses, and then gallop off at headlong speed toward the Concho ford.

"There seems to be some mysterious doings going on to-night," said Blackbird; "but, as we haven't been shot so far, I reckon we better glide easy toward the Concho. Once in the timber, we are all right."

It occurred now to Captain Blackbird, that, in all probability, these Indians had ambushed the ambulance and escort at the ford; but their visit to the dog-town was a mystery.

The thought that Winnie Warrington might have been captured, excited Blackbird greatly; and he resolved to visit the ford, under cover of the timber, and ascertain if his suspicions were correct.

With this end in view, he led the way direct toward the Concho, and after an hour's ride, he and his comrades entered the timber, and proceeded up the stream.

But it was tedious traveling, fully an hour being occupied before they reached the ford, which they approached with great caution.

Had they arrived half an hour sooner, they would, without doubt, have discovered Single-Eye; but the old scout had departed through the timber, north of the ford, and followed the trail of the Apaches to the point where their animals had been left, some three miles from the crossing. Here, he had entered the thick undergrowth, and having lariatied Skip-lively to a tree lay down to rest.

Consequently, when Blackbird and his three comrades reached the ford, all was silent as death.

From their position they could see no indications of the recent fight; and they guided

their horses cautiously down into the stream, when, to their horror, they discovered the mutilated soldiers lying out, at different points, half-submerged in the waters.

All the suspicions of the bandit chief were now confirmed. He felt positive that Winnie Warrington had been captured by Apaches, and was being taken toward the Pecos River.

That he could succeed in rescuing her, had he but a dozen men in his command, he was sure; and the thought maddened him, that such an opportunity was open to him, and found him without sufficient force to proceed on the trail.

However, he was destined to receive reinforcements in a most unlooked-for and amazing manner.

After the ghastly trick had been played upon Blackbird and his men by the road-agents, the latter crawled out from their hiding-places yelling and laughing like fiends at the success of their plot.

A more murderous, degraded, and desperate gang were never collected together. They unhitched the horses from the coach, and proceeded to secure a number of revolvers, carbines and bowies, as well as a supply of ammunition, coats and hats—to say nothing of money—from their victims.

A keg of whisky, found in the hind boot of the stage, filled the outlaws with joy; and a boisterous, fiendish crew they were, as they dragged the coach to one side of the road, threw the driver into the forward mail-box, and set fire to the conveyance.

Then they danced like demons around the flames in a way that would have caused the most bloodthirsty Apache to stare with envy and jealousy.

Their comrades now arrived with their horses and joined in the hellish orgies until the coach and its occupants were but a mass of smoldering ashes, bones and iron. Then, taking the stage-horses with them, they all galloped like demons of the night over the prairie toward the Rio Concho; halting, at times, to drink from their flasks and then yell in chorus.

Thus they dashed toward the Concho ford, all keeping silent as they drew near it; for they dreaded the dark shades, knowing not but that within the same, might lurk those who would avenge their terrible crimes. Besides, not recalling the passing of the ambulance and escort, they thought it probable that the soldiers might be encamped on the opposite side of the Concho.

And, as this motley crew of prairie-pirates rode slowly down the north bank into the river, they were discovered by the "Blackbirds," who immediately secreted themselves; concluding, by rapid reasoning, that the authors of the horrible crimes on the Colorado were approaching, and that these most murderous outlaws had played a most terrible joke upon them—a joke which the "Blackbirds" at once decided they would revenge.

As if to favor the latter, a cloud partially veiled the moon at the very moment the motley crowd of outlaws descended into the ford, and obscured the view until all had crossed the river, and were ascending the bank on the south side of the Concho.

When again the queen of night shone forth, making the road nearly as bright as day, but causing most grotesque shadows and lights within the timber, which, to the guilty and demoralized minds of the depraved demons, assumed shapes that were appalling; and at the time when all were most impressed, they reached the top of the bank, which brought them within view of the ambulance. Then they huddled themselves together; a confused, bewildered mass, expecting a volley from the escort—the evidences of the recent fight not being perceived by them.

At this very instant, the simultaneous report of four rifles, with deafening sound broke upon their terrified ears, close at hand, followed by a rattling fusillade of revolver-shots and wild yells; the deadly bullets whistling over the heads of the outlaws, and tearing the vines and foliage like sighs of the dying.

With one wild cry of terror and dread, in chorus, every man spurred for life, dashing through the timber to the north, and up the Concho; each man supposing that half of his comrades lay dead, in the rear, on the stage-road.

The exultant yells of the party who had ambushed them convinced them of this, and they doubted not for an instant that the escort of the ambulance had been lying in wait for them.

CHAPTER XXI.

ON THE ENEMY'S GROUND.

THE affrighted outlaws did not penetrate far into the timber, for the good reason that it was almost impossible to do so, except by the winding paths made by the buffalo or mustang; and these, in their excited state, they were unable to find.

As much as was possible, all had kept near each other, and, having recovered from their first paralyzing fear, they were ready to battle with desperate fury, rather than be taken alive, and hanged like dogs. For this, they well knew, would be their fate, should they be found to have been connected with the attack upon the coach, and the wholesale slaughter.

The surprise of all may be imagined, when they ascertained that not one of their party was missing, and that no one had been wounded, even in the slightest manner.

The mystery was soon explained. Soon, loud and clear through the timber, rung the words:

"Come back here, boys! This biz is tit for tat. You run your 'hearse' in on us, full of 'stiffs'; but we're even now, and the 'Blackbirds' will sing a welcome in your ears, more pleasing than 'blue whistlers.' Break brush for the ford!"

"That El Capitan Blackbird!" said Antonio, the Mestizo.

All made their way back to the ford, feeling much relieved, and were soon on the most friendly terms with Captain Blackbird, and the survivors of his once powerful band; each party laughing at the expense of the other, in connection with their recent fright on both sides.

Blackbird, at a glance, read the character of these men. He saw that they were a daringly-desperate gang of outlaws, and as merciless as Apaches.

He was convinced that they had attacked the stage and murdered all on board, and this so near a military post, proving that they had no leader of judgment or prudence. He immediately resolved, therefore, that these demoralized devils should be brought under his subjection, and that they should follow his lead to the Rio Pecos, attack the Apaches and tear Winnie Warrington from the power of the savages.

He well knew that such men would be greatly impressed in his favor, considering him their superior and worthy to command them.

The cloud that screened the moon again favored him greatly. He knew that these outlaws must have seen the escort and ambulance pass ahead of the stage, and the deep shadows would now prevent them from discovering the uniformed corpses among the river reeds.

This reasoning flaring through his mind, Blackbird acted upon it with the most favorable results to his plans.

Naturally intelligent and cunning when not too much under the influence of stimulants, Blackbird, being also a tolerable judge of character, decided upon immediate action toward bringing these men all under his command. He knew well that the way in which he could best impress them favorably toward him was by energetic and instantaneous action and by working upon their fears. With this view he allowed but a very short time for the passing of compliments.

"Follow me," he cried, "all who care to flock with the 'Blackbirds!' Come on, down the Concho for organization. We are in great danger here, for our shots may have been heard. Come on! It is time for 'Blackbirds' to fly."

The magnetism of the man was irresistible.

All drove spurs without hesitation, following close after Captain Blackbird and his three comrades.

Single-Eye, supporting Lionel Lacrosse, urged Skip-lively on, across the great dog-town, toward the junction of the Colorado and Concho and the lone cabin in the wood. The rescued sufferer was still senseless.

It was not easy traveling, and the old scout kept up a running string of talk to his horse as he stumbled over hummocks, seeking to avoid the dog-holes.

The fates had decreed that those so strangely parted six months previous on the Salado should again be brought together on this far-off border, amid scenes most terrible and torturing to both, only to be again separated under circumstances more awfully agonizing.

But the strangest part of all was that the

authors of all these miseries—Bird Blackwell and the Apaches—should again be prime movers to plunge the sufferers deeper into tortures of mind and body that should bury them in the darkest depths of despair—the only glimmering light from this dense cloud of merciless injustice being the appearance of one who, on the Salado, had sifted guilt from innocence and was now bending again his energies to right the wrong.

Single-Eye had sworn that, if Lionel Lacrosse could be found, he would find him.

Had the scout known that Winnie Warrington had been captured by Apaches at the ford, and that Lionel had also lost his liberty in his attempts to save her, he would have been filled with the deepest concern.

He knew that Blackbird was in the vicinity. He had vowed that he would hunt that cowardly assassin to the death; and now, having rescued Lionel, he was bringing him to the haunt of the outlaw, there to await events. Justice and mercy had slept; but yet, things had worked, and were working, toward a happier state of affairs.

While there is life, there is always hope. Winnie Warrington had cause rejoicing, from the fact that her uncle's life, as well as her own had been spared.

She would have had more cause for prayerful thanks, had she known that Lionel had been so providentially saved from a terrible death.

Single-Eye also, would have been greatly impressed, had he known that Blackbird had decided to return to his lone cabin, on the opposite side of the Concho, in place of going through the dog-town.

Had he taken the latter route, he would have discovered, and most certainly would have murdered Lionel. Not only this, but at the very time that the old scout was bearing the unconscious form of the young planter from the scene of his torture, he was barely screened by the friendly timber from the view of Blackbird and the desperadoes under him, who were bound to the same point as himself.

Thus it is, in this life of ours, when all seems the darkest and most hopeless, there is much behind the scenes to give us relief and joy, could we but see it.

And thus it happened, as we have mentioned, that Single-Eye, as he approached the lone cabin, hearing sounds proceeding from a crowd of boisterous men on the opposite side of the river, at once decided that Blackbird and his band were coming to their rendezvous, and that the lives of Lionel and himself were in great peril.

Notwithstanding the danger attending the attempt, the old scout resolved to break open the cabin, and secure for Lionel such articles as he felt sure must be inside. Halting suddenly, he placed the young man, who had now regained his senses, in a natural position in the saddle, and ordering Skip-lively to "stan' still, an' not move a peg," he darted through the woods to the outlaw's cabin.

Had not Blackbird halted, half-way between the ford and the cabin, to administer an oath of obedience to his new followers, they would have reached the spot before Single-Eye.

The old scout bounded like a startled deer, and threw his weight against the door. As the fastenings were in bad repair, it flew open, disclosing to the astonished gaze of the old scout, stores of all kinds, in piles reaching to the eaves; evidently stolen from citizen and Government wagon-trains. Clutching a pair of blankets, he spread them on the floor, and proceeded to fill them with bottles of wine and brandy, and such eatables as he could grasp together.

Drawing the load upon his shoulders, he made a hasty retreat, and soon reached the side of his faithful horse. Assisting Lionel to dismount, he bore him into a dense thicket, where, in a small clear space, he spread the blankets, and laying the suffering man upon them, bathed his wounds, dressing them with salve and ointment which he found in the cabin. But he saw, by the strange appearance of his pard, that he did not realize his condition; neither did he know who was waiting upon him.

Giving the young man a liberal dose of brandy, Single-Eye wrapped the blankets around him, and soon Lionel fell into a death-like sleep.

The scout next attended to his horse, and afterward with four revolvers, a five shot carbine and his old "Kaintuck," lying by his side,

ready for instant use, he sat watching the sleeper; and woe be to the man or men who might strike his trail, and come upon him, under such circumstances.

Skip-lively "tore grass" in an adjacent "open," and Single-Eye now, for the first time since the noon of the foregoing day, broke his fast; first taking what he called a "hefty ole pour-down o' terrantaler-juice," which, if any man ever did need, it was our old friend at this time of all others in his eventful life.

CHAPTER XXII.

A SHEEP IN WOLF'S CLOTHING.

WHILE Single-Eye sat watching Lionel, his senses on the alert, he distinctly heard the joyous shouts of the "Blackbirds," as they reached the cabin. His great concern now was, that some of them might, while in search of game, come upon him and his charge.

In that event he and Lionel were both doomed.

He would fight to the last, of course; but the bandits would rush in upon him in overpowering numbers.

It was now that he began to feel some strong regrets.

Coming up the Colorado, he had with him a man, who although of red skin, was every inch a man—his Indian pard, Turtle, the Tonkaway.

This was one of the most skilled and noted trailers among the Indians, and had always been friendly to the Texans. At his request, the old scout had allowed him to cross the Colorado, some ten miles below the junction, to seek for trace of "Blackbird."

Single Eye had agreed to meet the Tonkaway at the Concho ford; but the necessity which there was for prompt action on his part, following the startling discoveries that he made, caused the scout to break his word with the Indian. At sunrise, the time appointed for their meeting at the ford, Single-Eye was speeding up the trail, in search of Lionel, who, he felt sure had either been killed, or was suffering in some fiendish manner at the hands of his captors.

Now, however, in the dangerous position in which he found himself, he wished from the bottom of his heart that Turtle was with him. But, just as the regret and wish filled his mind a low, peculiar, bird-like whistle struck his ears, which he immediately answered, as agreed upon by these two prairie roamers.

Single-Eye's face showed great impatience, but he had not long to wait.

"Dog-gone my cats, Tonk! whar in thunderation did yer come from? I sw'ar, yer skeered me outen a year's grow, though I war wishin' fer yer. I feels like givin' yer a reg'lar ole griz' b'ar's hug!"

The stoical countenance of the Indian showed no little amazement when he saw his young white friend of Salado Creek, whom he and Single-Eye had long since given up as dead, outstretched before him, and evidently in a badly wounded condition.

Turtle, the Tonkaway, was a superb specimen of his tribe, being straight as an arrow, his frame muscular, and not an ounce of superfluous flesh upon him. This was unusual, for most of the Tonkaways are corpulent, and with fat, round faces and large heads. His nose was much more nearly Grecian than like the short pug so noticeable among his people, and his black, flashing, piercing eyes, together with a quick movement in folding his arms, indicated an agility and dash that was uncommon among the red-men of the Southwest.

His hair was long, reaching to his belt behind, and thrust back of his ears, where it was held by a beaded fillet, from which proudly flaunted three feathers of the black eagle—the insignia of a chief.

In full war-paint of vermilion and yellow ocher, with a narrow line of black pigment extending from the nose, on either side, to the ears; the Tonkaway had in addition, upon his bronzed breast, a representation of a turtle—the head, legs and tail of the same protruding from the shell, as if in energetic action.

But a moment did the Indian look at Lionel.

Then the muscles of his arms swelled out in huge knots, while the expression of his eyes showed intense fury; his form seeming to straighten and become more erect, and his nostrils distending like those of a blooded race-horse at a starting-post.

All this the old scout noticed. He knew how to interpret it. He perceived that Turtle had

been on the Apache trail, that he had seen the wagon-tongue, and now knew who it was that had been there tortured.

Single-Eye read this as plainly as if the Tonkaway had spoken it. Then he said, in a low voice:

"Tonk, yer hes bin on ther trail o' ther red bellyuns o' 'Paches, what kim nigh sendin' Lionel up t'other side o' ther moon?"

"Tur le has been on Apache trail," was the laconic return.

"But yer didn't know hit war our pard hyer thet they hed strung up ter squirm wi' tortur' ontill he slipped inter kingdom-come?"

"Single-Eye he heap sharp. How know?"

"I knowed by ther look in yer peepers; but whar in thunderation hev yer bin? Did yer skate from ther Colorado ford an' strike ther 'sign,' er hev yer bin ter ther Concho crossin'?"

"Turtle ride first up Colorado; ride on this side river to ford; then go 'cross plain to Concho. Turtle see heap. Apache on war-path. Bad white man on war-path. Hear yell now."

"Dang my cats, Tonk' ye're kerrect, an' we 'uns air in a pesky risky persish. Er course yer see'd whar Lone Wolf scalped ther soper boyees, an' yer knows they hes tuck a officer an' a kaliker-kivered female 'oman toward ther Pecos?"

"Turtle read all sign. Trail wide—white squaw, the captive. White chief with gold on coat, he captive—White squaw got hair like sun. White warriors got long knives on guns."

"How kim yer ter find out 'bout ther 'oman's ha'r?"

The Indian opened his pouch, and took from it carefully several long, wavy, golden hairs, saying:

"Turtle find hairs on thorn-bush, on trail."

"Yer gi'ns me a cramp in my ole heart, Tonk'. I can't ba'r ter think thet hit mought be Winnie, fer she's apt ter be a-travelin' with her uncle, what's a lieutenant in ther army. Dang my cats! I can't think o' hit. What else hev yer see'd?"

"Turtle see heap. Stage, he come fast. B d white men in tree jump on coach. Kill all men. Drink heap. Then drive to ford with dead men. Blackbird, he got so many men,"—holding up three fingers—"They hide in lush. Want rob stage. See dead men. Get scare. Then ride fast. More bad white men hide in stage. Bad white men burn coach. Then ride to Concho. Blackbird hide in bush. Then scare bad white men. Heap shoot, but all come back from wood."

"Blackbird, he yell. All ride fast to trail. Shake hands. Then ride down Concho on south side. Hear yell now. All at log wigwam."

"Wa-al, choke me ter death with a b'iled owl! I thought hit war ormighty sing'lar 'gards thar lein' sich a heap o' humans—er unhumans yer mought call 'em—down et thet cabin in ther p'int; but how on 'arth did yer know Blackbird's ranch war thar?"

"Turtle see 'sign' over river. Climb tree. Then see log lodge. See bad white men from tree. They go up river. Turtle follow trail."

"Wa-al, hit beats ther dickens how yer does sling yerself 'roun', Tonk! I hed no idee yer hed bin nigh ther Blackbird's nest. I jist 'roved et ther dog-town in time ter save Lionel's wind, I reckon; but he's mighty bad fixed in his brain-box. I wisht he'd kinder 'pear nat'ral-like speedy, fer thar's hefty biz ahead, I reckon. I war feelin' mighty con-sarned jist now."

"Ef ther cut-throat bellyuns down yunder, who must be 'bout es cussid es 'Paches, sh'ud run in on us, they'd gi'n us a hefty, breezy rifle of a he ole fight ter save our ha'r. Ef we 'uns kin git Lionel 'roun' ter biz, we'll skupe Blackbird in outen ther wet. Let's gi'n him 'nother dose o' brandy."

"I hes sworned thet ef Lionel doesn't split ther black heart o' thet cussid Bird, I'll do hit myself, fer ther mi'sry he's put ont'er ther best-est folkses on Salado Creek. But we must hump ourselves outen this afore long."

Single-Eye now proceeded to administer the brandy to Lionel, who was exceedingly restless, struggling as if he was being tortured in his slumber.

He was soon aroused, but he could not yet comprehend his condition, or at first recall his past terrible experience. The presence of the old scout and the Tonkaway tended, not a little, to confuse him, for he had seen neither

of them for many weeks previous to the tragic occurrences on Salado Creek.

The pain of his wounds, however, as Single-Eye began to dress them, caused the near past to be pictured to his mind in all its terrible details; and he sprang to a sitting posture, the agony produced by this sudden movement forcing a deep groan from him.

"Don't yer go ter git worried, pard," said Single-Eye; "ther ole man air hyer, an' Tonk' air clost by, ready ter cut, slash an' carve any galoots what shows thar physogs through ther bush; though I doesn't reckon thar air what's goin' ag'in' ther grain wi' yer."

The look of anguish that was stamped upon the face of Lionel caused the scout to cease speaking, and even the Tonkaway caught up his knife and revolver, as if eager to avenge the fearful wrongs of his young white friend.

"Oh, God in Heaven, protect her—protect my darling! Single-Eye, Turtle, I would thank you—but leave me! Leave me, for mercy's sake, and follow the trail of Lone Wolf!"

"Lieutenant Warrington and Winnie—Winnie, golden-haired Winnie, who has suffered so terribly—both are captured by the Apaches!"

"A worse doom than death hangs over my darling. Follow, pards, if you have any regard for me, for Winnie, for right, and justice, and mercy—follow Lone Wolf!"

With these words springing from his lips, so cracked and quivering, the young ranchero bounded to his feet, pushing the old scout aside for a moment, and again burst forth wildly:

"Down, demons of the dog-town! I'll crush your very bones within my grasp. Winnie, darling, I come to save you—I, Lionel!"

With this mad cry, his strong form reeled, and he fell backward into the arms of the Tonkaway.

"White brother heap bad in head," said Turtle, as he laid the young man tenderly upon the blankets. "Sun shine hot when tie in dog-town. Soon be on war-path. Turtle he go now. Take Lone Wolf's scalp."

"Wa-al, dang my ole heart, ef this ain't a purty perdicament fer me an' Skip-lively ter be cotched intar! Reckon we'll be gobbled, but no matter. Git, Tonk', an' do yer bestest. I'll fotch Lionel 'roun' afore night, an' we'll skute toward ther Pecos, es soon es I kin confistercate a critter fer ther boy, from ther Blackbirds."

The Tonkaway gave one earnest glance at the death-like face of Lionel, pressed the hand of the old scout to his breast, and then, in the long, peculiar strides of his people, hastened from the "open," his eagle-feathers flaunting a moment over the thicket, and then disappearing from view.

The gaze of Single-Eye was fixed upon the Indian, as the latter disappeared; then the old scout muttered:

"Hit's plasterin' hit a leetle too thick ontar us—a leetle too thick ter stay on a pilgrim's stumjacket!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

CONSTERNATION IN THE CAMP.

TURTLE, the Tonkaway, had not been gone five minutes, when Single-Eye, his lone optic rolling strangely, and darting impatient glances from Lionel to the open entrance, thence toward the river, and in the direction of Skip-lively, soon had his ears regaled with the bacchanalian sounds that reached him from beyond the Colorado, toward the cabin of the "Blackbirds."

It would have been evident to any observer, that the old scout was in a most unenviable position, somewhat bewildered, and exceedingly irritated at the condition of affairs; but his words, as he soliloquized, will explain the state of his mind.

"Dang my great gran'mother's ole black tom cat! Which I wish ter thunderation I hed now, fer they used ter say he war ther yery Ole Nick on cotchia' blackbirds—ther condemned kiotes, over ther drink, makes me es narvous an' oneasy es a ole hen with a long-standin' case o' reg'lar chokin' pip."

"Hyar I bees, in a mighty pervokin' pickle, an' a hefty cran o' ha'r scattered loose 'tween ther Concho an' ther Pecos, an' no show fer me ter skin a head; an' ther Tonk' air jist glidin' towards whar thar's a heap o' fun in ther slashin' line, plum erlone!"

"Hyar I bees, ole Single-Eye, an' ther r'arin', t'arin', scarifyiu' Paches hes gut leetle Winnie,

she thet allers hed a sweet smile an' a kind word fer ther ole man an' Skip, an' air a-totin' her ter tortur'."

"I sw'ar, I shall go plum offen ther handle! I'll chaw my own head off wi' pure hyderphobic indig', I'm dead sure I shall, if Lionel doesn't come back ter Texas, an' reg'lar brain an' muscle biz soon."

"I must git him a critter anyway, ef I hes ter skin through a ormighty tight place ter do hit. I've gut ter do somethin' despr'it er bu'st, that's sartin!"

"Dang'd ef I wouldn't jist es lieve make a run on Skip, right through ther cut-throat 'Blackbirds,' what's b'ilin' over now with ter-rantaler juice, an' send a few on 'em ter kingdom come!"

"I've gut a awful strong appertite ter blow up ther hull caboodle. What?"

Here, the old scout scratched his head, and gave a low whistle to himself, as if suddenly impressed with a grand idea, his eye flashing, as he continued—

"Wa-al, I reckon ther ole man ain't quite so slouchy when he 'gins ter work his thinkin' mersheen. I 'members a thing er two now, an' ef I doesn't play roots on ther 'bad white men,' as Tonk', calls 'em, I'm a howlin' liar by ther north star!"

"I'll pour a hull bottle o' brandy down Lionel's throat ef thet 'll gi'n him vim enough ter glide a leetle funder up ther river. Then I'll bump myself ter confistercate a critter an' start a young Fo'th o' July down yunder. They hes bin a-yellin' fer notbin' 'bout long enough; an' I'll bu't up house-keepin' fer 'em er git bu'sted a-tryin'."

"Ther ole man can't lay 'roun' when thar's any openin' fer fust-class fun—not much!"

With this conclusion, Single-Eye, with hasty movement, again caught up a brandy-bottle, and raising Lionel's head, administered a quantity of the liquor, also pouring some over his forehead and temples; which resulted in the young ranchero opening his eyes, this time, much to the joy of the old scout, appearing more natural.

"Lionel, old pard," said the latter, in a low voice, "thar's ther devil to pay an' no pitch bot. But I'm a-goin' to start a circus an' skupe in a nag fer yer."

"Does yer s'pose yer kin climb Skip an' skute up crier wi' me a little funder? Thar's somethin' gut ter be did purty speedy, er leetle Winnie an' ther lootenant 'll be tuck whar we 'uns 'll hev no show ter sa'erwate ther red bellyuns."

"Turtle has levanted Pecos-way; but he can't be s'pected ter clean out ther hull 'Pache nation all erlone. What d'yer say?"

"I feel better, Single-Eye, and I am tortured most terribly by this forced waiting and suspense. I believe I can, by supporting myself over the saddle and walking by Skip's side, gain a more secure hiding-place. I do hope and pray that to-morrow's sun will find me much better, for I shall go in pursuit of the Apaches, and the red demons shall find that they cannot take Winnie or her uncle toward the mountains beyond the Pecos."

"Great Heavens! Just consider it, old friend—consider the scene! Those painted devils, with hideous yells, dancing around that angelic girl at the torture-stake! I cannot bear the thought of it!"

"It burns into my brain and causes me to waver on the brink of insanity! Oh, for a part at least of my old strength! I have suffered more than any words can describe."

"Single Eye, I know that Heaven sent you to save me, and I have faith to believe that Turtle may trail those fiends to the Pecos. I know that he is to be depended upon, and that he will, if Winnie still lives, risk his life to save her."

"Do not for a moment think of endangering yours among those outlaws. Too much depends upon you now to attempt any movement toward revenge on Blackbird. Besides, he belongs to me."

"He must die by my hand! I will have revenge for all the danger and disgrace and misery that he has heaped upon my head and all the grief and anguish he has caused Winnie Warrington!"

"If you can get me a horse, without danger to yourself, do so; for I shall go mad if I do not soon get on the trail. That brandy has given me strength. It may brace me sufficient for the work ahead."

"Dang my cats!" exclaimed the old scout, with extreme relief and joy, "I didn't 'spect

I sh'd hear yer sling that much gab fer many a day, Lionel; an' I'm mighty full o' glad ter see yer 'pear so peart."

"Take a snifter o' brandy, an' we'll glide funder up ther drink. I'll pack ther tricks on my back, an' 'tween me an' Skip, I reckon yer kin manage to meander slightnally."

As he spoke, Single-Eye strode out from the opening, soon returning with Skip-lively to the entrance of the same, when he assisted Lionel to the side of the intelligent horse; the animal seeming to recognize the young ranchero, as he rubbed his head affectionately against his shoulder.

The old scout now came up with the plunder in the blankets, and carrying the same over his shoulder with one hand, walked by the side of Lionel, partly supporting the latter, who leaned upon Skip-lively, his arm over the saddle—all going slowly up-stream, the horse appearing to understand that the young ranchero needed his support.

Thus, for half a mile, they proceeded; then, in a horse-shoe bend in the stream, where the undergrowth was dense, Single-Eye espied a suitable "open," secure from observation. Here, he again spread the blankets, Lionel reclining upon them as before.

Laying rags, saturated with brandy, upon the wounds of his patient, and covering him with one of the blankets, the scout removed saddle and bridle from Skip-lively, lariatting the horse to a bush.

Taen, bidding Lionel compose himself, he stole away on the back trail toward their former position; each step in the direction of the bandit retreat increasing the furious thirst for revenge that ruled him.

In a very short time Single-Eye was in the undergrowth, on the north bank of the Colorado, and directly across from the cabin of the "Blackbirds."

These worthies, having been deprived of sleep for some time, and their brains being benumbed by continuous drinking, were now evidently reposing; for no sound could the old scout hear from his position.

Securing his revolvers to the back of his head, Single-Eye sunk into the dark waters, and swam slowly and silently across the river, crawling up the bank into the dense thickets, through which he made his way, stealthily as a panther.

Peeping through the foliage at a convenient position, he discovered the bandits, all lying upon the sward opposite the cabin, apparently all asleep; a chorus of snores giving good grounds for the supposition.

Again securing his belt of weapons around his waist, he made his way to the rear of the cabin, at a point where, when he was within the same, he had observed several kegs of powder closely packed against some Mexican blankets.

Upon reaching the rear of the cabin, securely concealed in some bushes that grew close up to the walls of the building, the old scout drew his bowie, and dug away the earth beneath the foundation log, until he had made a hole, through which he could thrust his hand and arm, and touch the blankets.

This done, he struck a light, thrust a quantity of dried grass that he had procured for the purpose entirely through the hole, and igniting the same, hastily crawled back on the same trail that he had come, until he reached the river. Then, he proceeded up the bank, until he knew that his movements would not be heard by the outlaws.

He then sprang erect, and ran as fast as he could toward the grass-grown space between the dog-town and the timber, where he knew that the horses of the bandits must be grazing.

In this he was not mistaken. Selecting two of the best animals, one of which was the blooded horse of Captain Blackbird, Single-Eye hastened again to the river, sprang upon one of the beasts and forded. Then, daringly, he galloped down-stream to the very point at which he had recently crossed for the purpose of firing the cabin.

He had been absent but a short time, but he had expected to have heard an explosion before he could return, and he began to fear that the grass had burned without igniting the blankets.

However, as he sat one of the horses, holding the other by the neck-ropes, he could plainly see a light through the loop-holes on the north end of the cabin.

"Dang ther cat's kittens what my ole kali-ker-kivered gran'marm used ter cuddle in her

apron, ef ther young Fo'th o' July ain't a-goin' ter hatch, an' spread hitself on a cyclone stompede. jist a-knockin' things ter flinders, an' singein' their pin-feathers all offen ther 'Blackbirds,' 'sides a wing an' a leg now an' then, I reckon!

"Gabriel air 'bout ter blow his horn an' bu'st up ther innercent slumbers o' ther lovely cut throats, what air innercent only when they're in that condition, an' d'ing'd ef I more'n half believes they is then! Reckon they practices devilment when—"

Further words in the old scout's soliloquy were prevented by a most terrific and thunderous explosion, followed by a crashing of huge branches and trees, as the heavy oaken logs of the cabin were shot upward and outward, with the velocity of bullets, in every direction; a sheet of blinding flame illuminating every twig and blade of grass, as it shot up, through the gloom to the very tree-tops.

Then came wild yells of fright and superstitious terror, of dread, horror and agony, as the outlaws sprung madly to their feet, three or four remaining dead, or mangled, in their blankets!

For an instant, the survivors gazed at the bewildering sheet of flame and smoke. Then, beginning to comprehend the catastrophe, they bounded like terrified deer, into the wood; as, crashing here and there, through the interlocked branches of the bottom timber, fell the logs that were blown up to a great height by the tremendous explosion.

Some of these, with sounding surge, fell into the river, dashing spray in all directions.

The Concho and Colorado bottom rung with maddened yells of desperation, the bandits being scattered in all directions unarmed; they having left their belts of weapons under the heading of their blankets, as they rushed madly out from the scene of destruction and death.

Some of the outlaws had bounded toward the river; and, to cause greater alarm and consternation, Single-Eye, with fierce yell and whoop and derisive laughter, that sounded as if a host of men were beyond the river, jerked his revolvers and fired a rattling fusillade here and there into the thickets on the opposite side of the stream.

Yells of agony proved that in some cases his bullets had not been missent.

This for the time satisfied the scout's desire to avenge the murder of the driver of the mail-stage and his passengers; and he was not without the hope that a chance bullet might have lodged in the heart or brain of Bird Blackwell.

Single-Eye next dashed up the river, screened from the view of those who had been so terribly appalled by his strategic movement, and who were now so terror-stricken and bewildered, that they were unable even to look about them; and too much frightened to pay any attention to the dark shades beyond the Colorado, except at the point from which the pistol-shots had flashed.

And so, back toward Lionel Lacrosse, with the magnificent horse of the bandit chief, dashed Single Eye, leaving behind him the blazing debris of the cabin, within which were being destroyed all the accumulated stores of the "Blackbirds" that had not been blown to fragments by the explosion.

The knowledge of this loss, when they came gradually to a realization of the state of things, drove the bandits to frenzy and insane desperation.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE TONKAWAY ON THE TRAIL.

LONE WOLF and his warriors, with their captives, lost no time in traveling over the plains that stretched between the Concho ford and the Rio Pecos.

They bent their course more to the southward, and again crossed the stage trail near the head-quarters of the Concho, and encamped the first night at that point.

Then, under cover of the darkness of the second night, they forded the Pecos at Horse-Head Crossing, making sure of no interruption by having advanced spies.

Then in place of proceeding directly west to the Apache Mountains, they galloped due south to the Sierra Charrate, to avoid leaving any "sign," and encamped in a great gorge, that afforded grazing-cover, and was easy of defense.

Here the Apache chief decided to remain, until the badly-fagged horses had recruited,

his reflections upon the retreat from the Concho having forced upon him the probability of pursuit by the soldiers at Camp Johnston. Indeed, he well knew that a detail would be dispatched on his trail, as soon as the slain escort should be discovered, which would be soon after his departure, for the down-country stage would pass the spot on its way to El Paso.

From the fact that the escort had all been shot and scalped, and an officer captured, Lone Wolf reasoned that a pursuing detail must have started on his trail shortly after his departure; hence his change from the course he would naturally be supposed to have taken, toward his stronghold in the Apache Mountains.

From the fact that his war-party had traveled at great speed day and night, to avoid being overtaken, previous to the ambush at the Concho, all were in a greatly fatigued and worn state; so they immediately rolled themselves in their blankets, after the horses had been attended to and the guard posted, and fell asleep.

The mouth of the gorge was narrow, and across it grew cedars, thick and dense; the towering rocks on either side affording a favorable position for sentinels to be posted, who could overlook the plain in the direction of the Rio Pecos.

Bound, as had been Lieutenant Warrington, he had suffered most terribly on the forced march from the Concho; but his sufferings were somewhat mitigated from the fact that he knew that Winnie's bonds had been cut, the chief knowing it to be impossible for her to escape; Lone Wolf having, with his party, overtaken the advance with the captive officer.

Upon arriving at the gorge, the lieutenant was cut free from the horse; and now, incapable of movement, his arms and legs benumbed by the tightly-drawn lariats, he was roughly dragged within the cedars, there laid upon his back and secured, his limbs outstretched, to the trunks of four trees—he groaning with agony, as his stiffened muscles were drawn into this new position.

He felt that no torture could be invented by the red fiends that would cause him more agony than he now suffered and had it not been for Winnie, he would have blessed the hand that would have driven a knife through his heart.

And Winnie—beautiful, golden-haired Winnie—though nearly dead from privation and anguish, the ruthless fiends hurried her along, being forced at times to carry her bodily, to the cedar thicket, there seating her at the trunk of one of the trees, to which they bound her in a position nearly opposite to that of her uncle.

Thus they left her, where she would be wrung with sympathetic anguish at every groan and convulsive shudder of her tortured relative.

But not a word spoke the hapless maiden. She noticed that her uncle was oblivious of her presence, and that his eyes were glassy and unnatural, resembling those of a corpse. Indeed, she would have thought him dead had she not detected the rise and fall of his breast in breathing.

Not a wink had either of the captives slept since they fell into the hands of the merciless Apaches; and poor Winnie now gazed upon the pallid face of her uncle, until strange fancies and horrible shapes seemed before her eyes.

The lieutenant seemed, to her disordered fancy, to burst from his bonds, and, hand in hand with Lone Wolf and his braves, dance in mad glee around the bleeding form of Lionel Lacrosse, who, bound hand and foot, and fastened in a crucified position, panted out his tortured life. The picture of his fate, drawn for her by the Apache chief, was never absent from her eyes.

Filled with horror, her parched tongue cleaving to her mouth and refusing to articulate, Winnie sat silent and motionless, her eyes fixed upon the view conjured up by thoughts of the near past and the present.

Then all became dark to her. The scene faded gradually. Her head fell forward upon her breast, her long golden hair veiling her face from view.

Winnie Warrington was at last oblivious of her dread surroundings.

And the lids slowly closed over the glassy orbs of Lieutenant Warrington, while his every

breath was a groan; but growing less and less in sound, and at length dying away, while the silence of death ruled the cedars, as sleep, in mercy, ruled the minds and bodies of the captives.

When Turtle, the Tonkaway, strode from the thicket-inclosed opening, within which were Lionel and Single-Eye, he broke into a run, darting this way and that with great velocity between the trees, and soon reaching the spot where he had secreted his horse.

The movements of Turtle proved that he did not propose to ride the horse on the trail of Lone Wolf, and it was evident that he would not make much headway did he do so, for the animal showed plain signs of having been ridden long and unsparingly.

Quickly leading the horse to the river, the Indian mounted, swam the animal across, and then, removing the saddle, bridle and neck-rope, left the beast to free range. He next proceeded through the timber toward the dog-town, soon after reaching the verge of the woods, whence he could view the horses of the bandits, which were picketed on the grazing-ground, between the bottom timber and the marmot city.

Supposing, very naturally, that a bandit was posted to guard the animals, Turtle proceeded to the south side of the clear grass-grown space and lassoed the best horse he could find.

This was a noble animal, unmarked by harness, and as full of life and vim as a fresh-rope mustang, proving that it had not been long on the line, and was uninjured by coach-dragging.

There was but one other horse in view that could compare with this one for beauty and speed.

This was the animal of Captain Blackbird, which, being in the middle of the group, the Tonkaway did not deem prudent to attempt to gain possession of for fear of discovery.

The plans that Turtle had formed admitted of no delay or imprudence of management.

Life and death depended upon his cunning and sagacity for the two or three days and nights to come.

The mind of the Indian was made up the instant that Lionel disclosed the names of those who had been captured by Lone Wolf. He resolved to save them, and formed plans immediately for the carrying out of that resolve.

Upon lassoing the horse, Turtle quickly saddled and bridled the animal, sprung astride, and, heading for the river, urged the steed into the stream.

Swimming across, he dashed through the belt of timber on the south side of the Concho, and soon was flying like wind in the direction of Horse-Head Crossing.

Speeding on, went Turtle, the Tonkaway; his black eyes flashing glances ahead, his eagle-feathers flaunting in the wind, his painted face showing iron resolution, and a thirst for revenge.

Thus on, flew the lone red rider, toward a horde whose skin was of a like hue, but who would rend the sky with yells of triumph, could they bind him to the stake, and break his iron will by slow torture.

Yet, knowing all this, Turtle sped on.

Not a thought of fear, or delay was in his mind.

Not a thought of personal consideration.

His life was thrown daringly into all this peril, to save those whose kind words had warmed his heart; and the memory of whose kind deeds, and the consciousness that they were now dependent upon him for life—that their release from torture and death depended upon his exertions, together with his hatred for their merciless captors—all this nerved him to continuous action.

All his natural frenzy and bloodthirsty excitement was regulated by his sagacity, and an iron determination to do or die.

God speed you, Turtle, on the trail; and give you strength and hope, that you may take both to those for whom you are now taking your desperate and daring ride into the jaws of death!

CHAPTER XXV.

ONCE MORE TO THE BREACH.

THE scene at the junction of the rivers, after the departure of Single-Eye, was a strange one.

Many of the lower logs of the cabin had been blown but a short distance, and the blankets and clothing, which had burned only on the outside of the piles, were also blown in

every direction; bursting now into bright flames, and igniting the heated logs. Consequently the bottom timber was brightly illuminated; the thickets and bushes casting weird and strangely shaped shadows.

Through the lighted spaces and paths, dashed in every direction the frenzied bandits; half crazed by their indulgence in drink on the previous evening, and filled with superstitious horror.

In no way could they account for the terrific explosion; although Blackbird well knew that his retreat had been discovered by some party of scouts or rangers, who were aware of his character, but not being strong enough in numbers to attack his force, had stolen into the rear of the cabin, and fired the same.

The discharge of revolvers, from the further bank of the Colorado, proved this conclusively; and Captain Blackbird was filled with consternation and deep concern, knowing well that whoever it had been who fired the cabin they must have observed the deserters from the army in his gang.

That being so, the murder of the mail-driver and his passengers would, as a matter of course be traced to them; and the troops at Camp Johnston would soon be on the march to attack him and his outlaw horde.

To evade these troops, however, was an easy matter, now that he was forewarned; and this danger caused him not one fraction of the intense fury that ruled him as he gazed upon the destruction on all sides of his secret retreat, which was now no longer of any use as a hiding-place.

That which most infuriated him was the entire destruction of his stores, which he had gained at risk of life, and had transported thither at great labor and trouble.

Now he was, as it were, powerless; and actual starvation threatened him and the recruits, with whom he had hoped to accomplish so much.

Without food, clothing, arms and liquor, he knew that he could do nothing with the desperate and murderous crew. But one plan seemed open, by which he could hope to maintain his authority.

This was to attack some small train of wagons, shoot the teamsters, and with the supplies thus gained, establish himself at some distant point, beyond the Pecos; or, even, as far as the Rio Grande.

As these thoughts flashed through his brain, Winnie Warrington was recalled to prominent consideration; she having been taken by the Apaches toward the point he now proposed to aim at.

Captain Blackbird knew that there was no time to lose, for he felt positive that whoever had fired the shots from beyond the Colorado must be now galloping to Camp Johnston for troops to annihilate his band.

He now congratulated himself upon having distributed arms, ammunition, and clothing among the men upon first arriving at the cabin.

As he thus thought over the situation of affairs, he stood in the shelter of a huge tree, watching the mad rush of his affrighted followers, who darted here and there, without any apparent object, all yelling like fiends.

Waiting until they had somewhat cooled down, and had reasoned, as far as their powers in that direction permitted, upon the recent astounding occurrences, Captain Blackbird walked slowly from his place of concealment, out into the broad glare of the conflagration, to the place where he had been sleeping at the time of the explosion.

Without the least show of excitement, he coolly picked up his canteen from the ground, and deliberately raised it to his lips, taking a long draught.

This was observed by some of his men, who drew the attention of the remainder to that quarter.

The manner and apparent unconcern of their leader impressed the demoralized men more than if he had yelled himself hoarse in striving to control them. One by one, they gathered around him.

As they came near, Captain Blackbird ordered them to secure their blankets, arms and equipments immediately, and to place them in a designated spot, where they would be safe from the flames.

It was found that three men had been killed by the explosion, and two others shot by the unknown incendiary from beyond the river.

This left the band twelve in number; but

some had been injured, though not so as to prevent them from mounting their horses and doing service in the event of an attack.

Captain Blackbird then, in a very plain and concise manner, explained the state of affairs and his proposed plans, as have been mentioned. He next ordered the horses to be led in and all to prepare for departure.

The outlaws felt that they were in a perilous position, and were ready and eager to do anything, or to go in any direction, they being greatly alarmed in regard to their safety, and much relieved at finding their chief had not been killed.

They all knew that not only must they depart from the vicinity, but that it was a matter of necessity now to make an attack upon some wagon-train, to gain supplies to replace those that had been destroyed. They must also seek out some secure and secret retreat, at a distance from Camp Johnston. Therefore, when their chief intimated his intention to strike out for the Rio Pecos they were all eager to start, and cheered lustily for Captain Blackbird.

Great was the fury of the latter when informed that his horse, as well as that of others, had been stolen; and he was now forced to mount the mate to the animal that had been taken by Turtle, the Tonkaway, which was far from being its equal for speed and bottom.

No time was lost, and in half an hour after the explosion Captain Blackbird, with his motley horde of desperate outlaws, was across the Rio Concho.

They then crossed the plain on the same course taken by the Tonkaway, not daring again to venture toward the ford and military station.

Had the "Blackbirds" gone directly up the river they would have discovered Lionel Lacrosse and Single-Eye, the former mounted on their captain's black steed, both proceeding slowly up the Concho, within the timber.

As the sun arose the following morning Lionel and the old scout arrived at the point in the timber where the Apaches had left it, and hastened south toward the Pecos. There, to the joy of the young ranchero, his own noble black came galloping down the river bottom, the animal having evidently escaped from the Apaches.

Here they halted, the wounds of Lionel being again dressed by Single-Eye, who bade his patient to—

"Take a lay-down an' rest, for everything air goin' all hunk."

The old scout had passed within a short distance of Camp Johnston, and could have visited that post without much loss of time, when, upon the information he possessed being made known to the commandant, a detail would have been immediately ordered in pursuit of the Apaches.

But Single-Eye well knew that should this be done there would not be one chance in a hundred for the rescue of the captives.

He was sure that Lone Wolf would soon detect any strong force in the vicinity of his war-party, and that the captives in such a case would be butchered forthwith, in order that they might not hamper the braves in the fight or retreat.

The only hope of rescue was upon strategy, and the scout had great faith in Turtle, the Tonkaway.

Cunning as was the Apache chief, he would not suspect that a party of two or three scouts would venture on his trail; and he would take no precautions against anything but a surprise from a body of troops, he knowing that the station patrol would, upon the non-arrival of the stage on time, advance to the Concho ford, and there discover the massacre of the escort.

Single-Eye knew that the horses of the Apaches were in bad condition, for he was aware that Lone Wolf had just returned from a foray down country.

Upon examining the trail of the Indians, made after the latter had abandoned the timber and started out over the open plain, the scout ascertained beyond a doubt that Turtle had not followed them; and he concluded that the Tonkaway had struck direct from the bandit rendezvous to Horse-Head Crossing, thereby saving nearly a day's travel.

Having discovered the horse of the Tonkaway in the timber, he knew also that the latter had secured a fresh animal from the stock of the outlaws, and judged that the friendly Indian must be near Horse-Head Crossing.

Imparting this intelligence to Lionel, they

both, after resting and allowing their animals to graze, started on the trail until it turned southward; and this, Single-Eye knew, was for the purpose of encamping on the south fork of the Concho.

Deeming any deviation from a straight line in the direction of Horse-Head Crossing unnecessary, they pressed onward, but not at such haste as to injure their horses; for they well knew that the time would soon come when their lives would depend upon their animals, as would probably the lives of Winnie Warrington and her uncle.

It was late on the following day after the arrival of Lone Wolf and his party at the great gorge in the Sierra Charrate Mountains, before the wearied braves sprang from their blankets.

The Apache chief at once dispatched one of his warriors on the back trail to Horse-Head Crossing; directing him to secrete his horse in the timber, climb a tree, and watch for the approach of any enemies from the north plain beyond the Rio Pecos.

If any signs of pursuit were discovered, he was ordered to steal further down the river, and ascertain the direction taken by the pursuers.

Having sent out this spy, Lone Wolf and his braves proceeded to make up for lost time by feasting upon the mule-meat, which they had cut from the hams of the slain animals of the ambulance.

Winnie was given a quantity of broiled venison, as was also the lieutenant; the latter being relieved of the bonds about his wrists while eating, and allowed to pour water upon them, and upon his swollen and abraded ankles.

Both the captives had passed a terrible night, being frequently aroused from their strange, benumbing sleep by the fearful dreams that ruled their slumbers.

These, however, were not much more terrifying than the realization of their condition upon awakening.

The lieutenant had been as one dead, until a warrior had poured water over him, and down his parched throat; but, by a superhuman effort, he had thrown off the oppressive feelings, and repudiated his great agony, in order that he might give hope and encouragement to his niece.

"We must eat and drink when we get the opportunity, my darling," he said to her; "for, should there be men on the trail to rescue us, they will not be able to save us, unless we can, in a measure, help ourselves."

"We shall be as helpless as infants, if we do not fight against our feelings and sufferings, and try to keep up what little strength we have left. I acknowledge that there is but little room to hope; but, if I am doomed to the torture, it cannot exceed what I have endured already."

"You, my darling, must take your own life, if the worst should come, rather than meet the fate that is reserved for you."

"If you can get your bonds free, when they drag me to the torture stake, for God's sake, rush to my side, and put a ball through my brain. Then turn your revolver to your own head. This must be a last resort, however."

"We may hope on, while we remain in this camp, and on the march to the Apache Mountains."

"They will not torture us until they reach their village. Then they will give their bideous squaws an entertainment at our expense. But hope on, my angel one, while there is life."

"Oh, that I could save you from these demons! But, even if I were free this moment, I could not walk a step to save my own life. I have had hope that perhaps the brave young man, Lacrosse, who dashed so gallantly to our rescue, might not have been killed; but, as Lone Wolf said, secured to a pole; to die a lingering death. I have hoped that he might be discovered, and released; and, if so, I feel that he would leave no stone unturned, but would again risk his life to save us."

This was spoken with difficulty, but a few words at a time, by Lieutenant Warrington, as the suffering man sat, striving to eat; a burly brave watching his every motion.

His words served to cheer Winnie not a little, although she well knew that they were uttered for that purpose alone. She felt that but faint hope was manifested in the intonation of her uncle's voice.

Thus the day passed.

The Apaches continued to feast, and frequently changed their animals to fresh grass; yet the spy that Lone Wolf had sent out to Horse-Head Crossing returned not.

This was a circumstance that caused the red demons to feel more secure, and once more to roll themselves in their blankets; satisfied that, for this night also, there was no fear of alarm or attack.

Had there been such, the spy would have reported enemies approaching the crossing from the direction of the Concho, north.

Again night enveloped the gorge.

The suffering Winnie looked more pallid, haggard and worn, as again she fastened her blue eyes in a glassy stare upon the outstretched form of her suffering relative, from whom all hope, as well as speech and motion, seemed to have departed.

The dense gloom changed soon to a bright and beautiful moonlight, causing Winnie to remove her eyes from her unconscious uncle, and to gaze up into the star-studded arch of blue, through the interstices of the tall trees that surrounded them.

Her trembling lips whispered pleading prayers for deliverance from the pitiless savages; wondering why He, who ruled the ten thousand worlds above her, could permit such terrible fiends to torture to the death those who had done them no harm.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE WORK IS BEGUN.

TURTLE, the Tonkaway, knew that he had at least a hundred and forty miles to ride, before reaching Horse-Head Crossing; but there was one advantage. His course led him parallel to the Concho, and near the timber, into which he could dash at any time, to allow his horse to drink, as well as for a short rest while cropping a little wild rye. Full forty of these miles were covered before the sun arose, and the Tonkaway began to see that he must secure another animal—this time a mustang—as the American horse could not stand the run to the Pecos.

Quickly springing to the earth, he detached a lasso from the cantle of his saddle, and securing the bridle to a bush, he entered the thick shades; succeeding in making his way through them until within a proper distance for casting his rope, the slack end of which he fastened to a small tree.

A moment after his lasso circled into the "open," where the herd had stopped to rest, and the noose dropped over the head, or leader of the herd.

The mustang was brought to the earth, and a band of buckskin was quickly bound about its eyes, after which Turtle slackened the lasso, and thrusting his hand into the mouth of his captive, drew out its tongue, by which he led it along until he reached his fagged steed.

Saddle and jaw-strap were soon changed, and giving the stage-horse free range, Turtle sprung upon his prize, removed the buckskin blind, and the mustang shot like an arrow toward the Rio Pecos; kept in favorable course by jerk of jaw-strap, and an occasional blow on the side of its head from a quirt.

Thus rode the Tonkaway, mounted upon a mustang steed that could gallop from rise to set of sun; but the animal was much fagged when half the distance between its place of capture and Horse-Head Crossing was reached.

Fortune, however, still favored Turtle, for he succeeded in lassoing a fine horse, that had been lost, or left by some military detachment passing up the trail. This animal was in good condition, and before midnight the Tonkaway was stealing through the timber cautiously, at Horse-Head Crossing, having suspicions than an Apache spy must have been there stationed by Lone Wolf.

After a stealthy reconnaissance he forded the Pecos, and then urged his horse up the trail, where, for a moment, the moon spread over the earth a flood of light, soon to be changed by a dense cloud into a pall of darkness.

But that brief interval of bright silvery light was Heaven-sent, for, during its rule, the piercing eyes of the Tonkaway swept the plain, north, west, and south, and he uttered a grunt of blended surprise and relief, for but a few hundred yards in the last-mentioned direction, he discovered a mounted Apache brave, pointed down the Pecos, in place of up toward the Apache Mountains.

This changed the course of Turtle in just the

opposite direction from that he had first intended.

The break in the clouds that permitted the moon to shine down upon the Apache spy was his death-signal, for the Tonkaway half whirled his steed, and guided the animal directly toward his foe. All this time the latter did not dream of the presence of an enemy in his rear.

Wearied by long watching, the Apache did not urge his horse from a walk.

Again the broken and scattering cloud bank allowed the moon undisputed sway. This time, as Turtle knew, by a study of the sky, for some little time; and, as the mellow light illuminated the plain, he found himself, as he had hoped and expected—not fifty yards from his foe.

Gathering the jaw-strap in his left hand, favorable to his intended movements, the Tonkaway urged his horse suddenly forward.

One look cast the hideous Apache behind him.

Discovering that an Indian was dashing toward him, he at first supposed it to be one of his fellow braves sent to recall him to camp.

A second glance, however, as well as the sound that filled his startled ears, forced upon him a far different conclusion; and he jerked his knife, and strove to whirl his horse to meet his foe—for he now recognized the war-paint of a tribe that were the most bitter enemies of the Apaches.

At the same moment the wild war-whoop of the Tonkaway broke on the air, and before he could present a fighting front, Turtle's mustang dashed against his own animal. The scalping-knife of the Tonkaway glittered for an instant before his eyes; and then, crashed down with horrible grating sound, that sent the death-chill to his very finger-ends.

The knife dropped from the Apache's hand, his arms beat the air wildly, as he shot out his awful death-yell, and fell dead upon the plain.

Then once more rung the exultant war-whoop of the Tonkaway, as Turtle, holding fast to the jaw-strap of the warrior's horse, tore the reeking scalp from the head of his foe, and waved the trophy in the air.

He then mounted the horse of the Apache spy and dashed southward, fully satisfied that the war-party of Lone Wolf were encamped in the Sierra Charrate Mountains. Indeed he had not the slightest doubt of it; for he had reached a point when he had slain the Apache where there had been no pains taken to leave a blind trail, and traces of the war-party were to be seen even by moonlight.

And here we leave the faithful Tonkaway, speeding further on, to danger and almost certain death, in his endeavor to save his friends.

It was in the small hours of the morning, when the sleep of mankind is the deepest and but few and slight sounds disturb the stillness of the night in the great gorge.

Now and then the snort of a horse is heard, but that is the only noise within the encampment of Lone Wolf, excepting when the weird howl of the black wolf comes occasionally from the plains.

For some time the moon has been obscured, but now bursts forth in all its splendor, seeming to have gained in brightness from being forced for a time by the clouds to withhold its smile.

Here and there along the eastern side of the gorge, beneath the shade of the cedars, can be seen the hideous painted face of an Apache brave; the eyes closed in sleep peaceful as that of a child, though their main object in life is murder, and every crime is upon their souls.

Down at the mouth of the gorge are two braves, who idly smoke their cigarettes, apprehending no danger that cannot be detected afar off in time to prepare to meet it.

Even the sentinel on the rocks is not aware of the presence of a dark form in his rear—a bronze body, upon the breast of which is a turtle, done in different colored pigments. This totem, should he discover it, would speak to him of sudden death, or of a terrible struggle for life. Above that turtle flash eyes that are filled with a vengeful look; a fierce and determined desperation that beeds no impediment in the trail, that quails not even when the death film shuts out the earth from view forever.

Crouched, like a panther ready to spring, is the faithful Tonkaway. By a scrutinizing survey of the camp, he had been enabled to lay his plans to save Winnie Warrington and her uncle, if it lay in his power so to do.

But a moment does he remained thus. Then, with a portion of a blanket in his left hand, and his knife in his right, he bounds forward. The fragment of blanket is thrust into the Apache's mouth, effectually gagging him.

Then follows the sickening sound, as the knife is plunged into the heart of the red sentinel, and his blood spurts over the rocks; the moon revealing the scene with a vividness that was horrible.

And terrible were the death-struggles of the doomed brave; but the iron grasp of the Tonkaway held him as in a vise, and no sound of a death-yell could come from him.

Soon, the last convulsive throes told him the sentinel was dead; and the movements of Turtle were now rapid, proving how well he had studied out his proposed manner of proceeding. Quickly removing the paint-bag from the belt of his victim, he opened the same, and taking a small round mirror from his pouch, and also a moist rag, he removed the paint from his face, and daubed the Apache war-stripes on his own visage.

He next removed his eagle-feathers, and then tearing off a portion of the breech-cloth of the dead Apache, which was nearly the same color as his own skin, he covered with it the turtle totem on his breast.

The slain sentinel had no head-dress, and as Turtle now stood, his appearance was much like that of his victim. But now came the most critical moment. He had decided upon playing a very dangerous game; and one that could not be successfully carried out, more than once in a hundred times. Nevertheless the Tonkaway never faltered.

He lunched the corpse of the Apache down the dizzy height into a clump of cedars on the opposite side of the rocky spur from the two sentinels who were stationed at the entrance of the gorge, near where there were a number of the horses picketed. This caused the animals to snort, and run back and forth madly.

Turtle felt sure that this would draw one of the guards from his post below, and he was not mistaken; for, the moment after; as he glanced over the rock, but one remained. He then stepped boldly within view, and, by an impatient gesture, beckoned the only guard at the entrance to come up to his side, signifying that something was wrong on the plain.

The Tonkaway showed, in his stoical face, nothing of the intense anxiety that ruled his brain.

Life and death to himself and his white friends, hung upon the next few instants.

Turtle was playing a fearfully desperate game, but he was equal to the emergency.

The sentinel bounded up the rocks like a mountain goat, and sprung to the lookout, almost knocking the Tonkaway over the cliff in his eager anxiety to know what danger threatened.

But his eagerness was soon banished. His anxiety was soon changed to the death-agony.

The iron grip of Turtle was upon him, the blanket-gag was in his mouth, and the knife in his heart ere he realized that he was in the clutch of other than his fellow-brave.

Soon the second victim of the Tonkaway sunk dead upon the rock, and the latter darted down to the entrance of the gorge, in time to meet the returning sentinel, who met his supposed comrade with an impatient "Ugh," signifying by that, and the gesture that accompanied it, that all was right.

Again a slight thrashing of brush, and a horrid gurgling sound might have been heard, and then all was still. Death ruled there—the third victim of the red avenger lay stark and covered with gore!

Did I say death ruled there?

I was wrong. Proud as a prince, the smothered war-cry causing his lips to tremble as he waved his blood-stained knife over his head, stalked the Tonkaway out from the cedars—thus far master of the situation.

Thus far he had played his cards well, and by his bearing seemed confident that he held the winning-hand to the last, and would "sweep the board."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE RESCUE.

THE past movements of the Tonkaway had been rapid, and his future operations, he felt, must be more so. Much remained to be done. There was a vast plain to be crossed before

daylight, or all that he might yet accomplish would be lost, and his own life in addition.

He lingered but a moment at the entrance of the gorge. At the slightest alarm, he well knew, it would swarm with Apaches, now in the embrace of sleep.

Having viewed the camp from above and discovered the captives—a sight which nerved him for the desperate undertaking—Turtle now stole on among the cedars until he reached the point where Winnie and Lieutenant Warrington were bound.

Stepping to the head of the officer, as the latter lay apparently dead, the Tonkaway was relieved to see that Winnie's eyes were open and fixed upon himself, although their gaze was one of horror.

Turtle slowly raised the cloth that covered his breast, thus disclosing the *totem*, which he knew she had often noticed far away on Salado Creek.

Slowly a look of relief began to spread over the poor girl's face, though doubt and concern were still visible.

Soon, however, the Tonkaway was at her side, whispering, and giving a quick gesture of caution.

"Winnie no know Turtle. Turtle heap good friend. See Winnie on Salado many moons ago. Turtle come save Winnie. Come save chief of white soldiers. Put on Apache war-paint. Kill so many Lone Wolf's braves"—holding up four fingers—"Single-Eye he come soon. One-eye scout he save Lionel. Both come on trail. It is good. Moonshine for Winnie. Ride fast to Concho. Turtle no make noise. Come!"

At once, the tortured maiden seemed to comprehend it all. She and her uncle were to be saved. She now saw that the disguised warrior was indeed Turtle, the Tonkaway, and she believed his words. Lionel had been rescued, and he and Single-Eye were on the trail.

Quickly Turtle severed the cruel ropes that bound Lieutenant Warrington. He then left the officer where he lay, and grasping Winnie in his sinewy arms, stole through the cedars, towards the entrance of the gorge.

"Turtle carry Winnie out gorge. Come back, get soldier chief. He no walk. No talk. Much heap torture. Make Apache sound death-yell when get well."

Winnie would have urged the Tonkaway to bear her half dead relative away first, had she dared to trust herself even to whisper; for she could not tell what sound her parched tongue would make.

The cedars were soon passed, and the maiden was placed near some of the bowlders at a distance from the gorge; thus remaining alone in her mental agony, until Turtle returned, bearing Lieutenant Warrington in his arms.

Without a word, the Tonkaway laid his burden on the grass, and again clasping Winnie in his arms, sprung into a *motte* of cedars near by, where three fully equipped horses were secured. These animals, he had selected from the Apache herd, choosing those that had been lassoed at the Concho ford by the Indians, and which had belonged to the slain soldiers of the escort.

These he had secured before the moon had shone out, and previous to his killing the guard.

Placing the young girl on one of the saddles, he asked:

"Winnie no ride—Turtle, he carry in arms?"

"I think I can keep the saddle," she replied. "I feel better each moment. You will be forced to carry my uncle, or to tie him on the horse; for he is more dead than alive. Oh, do let us hasten from this dreadful place, before they discover us! I shall faint if their war-cry sounds."

The Tonkaway did not wait to hear all the words of Winnie, but hastily clutching the lieutenant, laid him across a saddle. He then fastened the jaw strap of the horse ridden by Winnie to one side of his saddle, and that of the extra animal to the opposite; then, gathering the lieutenant in his arms, and gaining an easy position, he bade Winnie hold fast.

He then urged the animals free from the cedars, heading directly toward the Pecos river north, in place of northwest; as three times the distance of open travel would be necessitated by the latter course.

Again the moon, as if reviewing these proceedings with favor, hid her bright face in a dense cloud, thus aiding the fugitives in their escape.

Filled with a relief and thankfulness that were far beyond the power of expression, Winnie Warrington clung to the hook-like horn of the Apache saddle, blessing the moon for her opportune withdrawal. And good cause was there that she should do so; for, before a quarter of a mile was covered, there rung out through the darkness, a terrible yell, followed close after by a deafening chorus of whoops and howls, proving that their flight had been discovered. The howls informed Turtle that the corpses of the slain sentinels had been found, and his breast swelled with exultation, as he said:

"Apaches, they squaws, no warriors. Winnie no be afraid. Moon gone. Apache no owls. No see when dark comes. Soon hide on Pecos. Make fool of Apache. Lone Wolf ride fast in dark to Horse-Head Crossing. Mebbe so long-knives take scalps. Mebbe so Lionel and Single-Eye there."

"Turtle heap glad got Winnie, got soldier chief, got Apache scalps, got horses. Turtle heap glad."

The confident tone of her red friend reassured the maiden, and she began to see that there was a probability of their reaching a place of safety before the moon again appeared. It was more than likely that Lone Wolf would dash in pursuit toward the Crossing, naturally supposing they would take that direction.

She had not the remotest idea to what point of the compass they themselves were hastening; but she had implicit trust and confidence in the brave who had risked his life in such a daring and reckless manner to save herself and her uncle.

And the fertile brain of Turtle, as he, by a strange and unaccountable instinct peculiar to his people, kept on his course direct toward the Rio Pecos, was not idle.

He knew that it was not probable that Lionel and the old scout would reach Horse-Head Crossing before the following afternoon or evening, though they might urge their horses to as great speed as the animals could bear; consequently he, with the captives, must gain some hiding-place where they could remain secure from discovery during the following day.

He was not aware what kind of a horse Single-Eye would secure for Lionel, so the time of their arrival at the Crossing could not be depended on. Skip-lively, he knew, was a beast that, like its master, could stand almost anything, although ungainly and awkward.

Turtle felt sure that the Apaches would first go to Horse-Head Crossing in search of the rescued captives, and then, when their trail was not discovered on the north bank going out from the ford, Lone Wolf would immediately dash back, examine the ground, and without difficulty find the right trail.

This being probable, he must, in some manner, evade leaving any "sign" upon reaching the Pecos.

For himself he had no fears, for, if hard pressed, he could abandon the animals and escape easily on foot, leaving no trace to guide his pursuers.

But he had Winnie and the lieutenant to think of.

As the trio proceeded but slowly on account of the low state of Lieutenant Warrington, they heard the yells of the infuriated Apaches; and Turtle knew that Lone Wolf, at the head of his braves, was speeding north, in the direction of Horse-Head Crossing.

And now, a new idea occurred to the Tonkaway.

The Rio Pecos was not fordable, except at the stage-crossing, on account of the high, precipitous banks; but he was confident that he could find a place where, by the rocky nature of the banks, he could carry Winnie and her uncle across the river with the assistance of a dry dead-wood raft, and then convey them up the opposite bank and secrete them.

The Apaches would not think of such a thing as the fugitives crossing the river, a feat they never attempted themselves; so the Tonkaway felt certain of success.

Winnie, too, began to feel renewed hope, and the knowledge that Lionel Lacrosse had escaped from the horrible death to which his captors had condemned him, enabled her to bear her present sufferings with resignation.

But both she and Turtle were greatly concerned in regard to Lieutenant Warrington; the brutal manner in which the red fiends had drawn the rough ropes, almost pulling his bones from their sockets. Besides this, the

great fatigue and privation from food and sleep had brought the brave soldier to a condition, which his anxiety on account of his niece had completed, amounting to physical and mental collapse.

Although the young girl was anxious to question Turtle in regard to his opinion of her uncle's death-like state, she refrained from so doing; supposing, by the silence of the Tonkaway that he was now planning their future movements. So, indeed, he was; although the condition of the officer was not absent from his mind.

Eventually they reached the Rio Pecos, and soon after their friend, the moon, again threw down her flood of light; the clouds having swept to the westward, having done their part in saving the lives of the captives, who, but for them, would have had no chance of escape.

Much to the relief of Turtle, after passing through a narrow belt of timber, he found that he had struck the river at a point which seemed favorable to his plan of crossing. Hastily he secured the horses to the branches overhead, and then assisted Winnie to alight.

Bearing her down the dangerous descent to the water's edge, the poor maiden clasping her arms trustingly about the bronze neck of her preserver, Turtle hastened up the rocks. Soon he returned, bearing in his strong arms the still apparently senseless form of Lieutenant Warrington.

The eyes of the latter were now open, but there was no intelligence in their fixed gaze. His features were, however, contorted with the agony which he suffered from the stagnated circulation, caused by the cords and the unnaturally strained muscles.

"Oh, uncle Warren!" exclaimed Winnie. "We are saved—really saved! Turtle, the Tonkaway, is supporting you. He slew the guards at Lone Wolf's camp, and saved us. We are free from the Apaches."

"We are now on the Rio Pecos. Lionel Lacrosse is saved also, and he and Single-Eye the scout are coming on the trail. You understand me, uncle, do you not? Turtle has saved us. We have been most miraculously saved from a terrible fate!"

The young girl sat on the rocky Pecos bank, with her lacerated feet in the cool waters, her small white hands clasped, and her pale face turned heavenward, while she breathed her thanks to Him whom she had almost come to believe had deserted her, but who, at last, had sent the faithful Tonkaway on the trail to save her.

And as the explanatory words fell from the lips of his niece, Lieutenant Warrington comprehended all.

He cast a glance full of deepest meaning into the eyes of the Tonkaway and then clasped his hands in prayer.

Turtle stood apart, gazing with superstitious awe upon those who were "having a talk with the Great Spirit."

Half an hour afterward both Winnie and the lieutenant were on the opposite side of the Rio Pecos, securely hidden in a dense thicket, each being provided with blankets that had been thoughtfully appropriated by their rescuer from the Apaches.

Bidding Winnie and her uncle rest without any further apprehensions, assuring them that there was no longer any danger and that they must sleep until he returned, he left them, removing all "sign" with the greatest care, and sending the raft of logs upon which he had been enabled to cross with his helpless passengers, down the river.

Having accomplished this, Turtle mounted the same horse that he had previously ridden, and leading the other two as before, made as broad a trail as was possible along through the timber of the Pecos, proceeding toward Horse-Head Crossing.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE PURSUIT.

THE Tonkaway had felt that there was no safety on the south side of the river, and that the lives of all depended upon passing Horse-Head Crossing.

As Lone Wolf had dashed directly to that point, with the strongest reasons for so doing, Turtle was forced to do as he had done.

He knew that not a quarter of the distance from the Apache camp to the crossing could have been gone over with the rescued captives before they would have been surrounded, and probably put to instant torture; hence he had

taken the only direction that promised safety and still be traveling toward the Concho.

His plan for crossing the river had occurred to him on the instant, and, with its accomplishment, other and more favorable movements occurred to him, and which he at once set out to put into execution.

The first was to proceed toward Horse-Head Crossing in the cover of the timber, keeping a lookout for the return of Lone Wolf and his disappointed braves, who, upon reaching the crossing, would quickly ascertain that those of whom he was in pursuit had not been at the ford.

Then, of course, Lone Wolf would return to his camp, put his best trailers at work, and undoubtedly discover the true trail, following the same to, and up the Pecos, when, convinced that he had been outwitted, he would dash out from the timber and again gallop to Horse-Head Crossing.

Meanwhile he himself would have reached the latter point, crossed to the north side of the Pecos, and turned down the river to the place where he had left Winnie and Lieutenant Warrington. By that time, the latter would be probably able to ride without much discomfort.

It would take him until the following afternoon to reach them. Then, they would all speed toward the head-waters of the Rio Concho, without doubt meeting Single-Eye and Lionel Lacrosse—perhaps, too, a detachment of troops from Camp Johnston, on the trail of the Apache chief.

All this seemed to the Tonkaway easy of accomplishment, compared with his experience previous to crossing to the south side of the Rio Pecos.

Knowing that they would, in all probability, have a race for life, when proceeding over the plain toward the Concho, as Lone Wolf would by that time have again reached Horse-Head Crossing, Turtle now permitted the animals to travel at a leisurely gait.

Half of the distance had been passed, when the Tonkaway was conscious of a rumbling sound, proceeding from the direction of the plain toward the south; and, urging his horses toward the edge of the timber, he peeped through the undergrowth, and his black eyes glared and snapped at the sight that met his view.

Not two thousand yards from his covert lashing their quirts about the hams of their snorting steeds, on, over the plain toward the Sierra Charrate Mountains, sped the war-party of Lone Wolf; their feathers flaunting, and their long hair flying wild.

Bent forward, in eager, maddened haste, all insane with fury at being outwitted by a detested Tonkaway, who, all had sworn, should now be a witness of the protracted torture of the White Chief, and then himself die by slow degrees, while their exultant yells filled his ears.

But none in that savage horde were so madly furious, as was the hideous chief, Lone Wolf.

The success of the Tonkaway, and the death of four of his braves, as well as the loss of the captive officer, were as naught to him, compared with the intense anger and disappointment occasioned by having "Sun-Hair" wrested from his possession.

He had planned much to enhance his popularity in his own tribe, and create a great jealousy in the neighboring ones, through her.

Her angelic beauty had superstitiously impressed him, and he had vowed that she should act her part in maintaining his supremacy above all other chiefs among his people. That she possessed powers beyond those of common mortals, Lone Wolf sincerely believed from the first; and that idea was general with his braves. He was now convinced that "Sun-Hair" had, in some mysterious manner, caused the Tonkaway to be transported from afar to her rescue, giving him a power and cunning beyond that of himself, or any of his tribe.

Upon not detecting the "sign" at Horse-Head Crossing, which would betray the passage of the released captives, the chief had been most strangely affected; and for a time harbored the thought that "Sun-Hair" had, with the officer and Turtle, flown through the air, and thus crossed over the Pecos to safety.

But, upon deliberation, he began to perceive that the same strategic power that had enabled the Tonkaway to enter the camp in the gorge, after killing all the sentinels, would be used in the escape later on; and that Turtle would

know it could not be accomplished, by going over the plain toward the crossing, in a north-west direction, as the fugitives would without doubt be overtaken. This reasoning led Lone Wolf to surmise the course that had actually been taken.

He sped, therefore, on the return, to take up the trail, having no doubt that it would lead direct from the gorge to the Rio Pecos, but not having the remotest idea that the rescued whites would cross the river.

Turtle watched the fast-flying Apaches but a moment. His face lighted up with pride at having outwitted Lone Wolf, and he sped on, proceeding, as soon as he could do so with safety, into the open plain.

He then put his horses to a headlong gallop, reaching and passing Horse-Head Crossing when the sun was about three hours past the eastern horizon.

Once more on the north side of the Rio Pecos, Turtle swept the plain toward the head of the Concho, but there was no break in the broad expanse—no indications of either Single-Eye and Lionel, or a detachment of soldiers. Again he urged his horses down the river, this time on the north side, toward the point where he had left Lieutenant Warrington and Winnie.

He knew full well that Lone Wolf and his braves were on the opposite side of the river, and following his trail like blood-hounds.

As the sun nearly reached the meridian, the Tonkaway began to favor his horses on account of the intense heat. He guided the animals into the timber, soon reaching the covert, where those whom he had risked so much to save had been left.

Turtle now advanced toward the thicket, and was greatly relieved at the approach of Winnie, who, with a thankful and joyous smile, greeted him.

"Oh, Turtle, I am so rejoiced to see you again! I feared you had been slain or captured; and I have been greatly terrified besides, for I heard those dreadful Apaches over the river.

"They must have discovered the trail of our horses. But I am so glad to inform you that uncle is getting along nicely. When shall we start from this place?"

"Jump on mustang soon. Turtle make long trail for Lone Wolf. Apache chief he heap mad. Want Turtle scalp. Want Soldier Chief scalp. Want Winnie. Come. Turtle want see Soldier Chief."

"He will be glad to see you again," said the maiden.

The two walked side by side into the thicket, and as they penetrated the same, Lieutenant Warrington, with much effort arose to his feet, and extended his hand to the Tonkaway, saying:

"Thank Heaven, my noble red friend, that I see you again, and unharmed! I feel like another man, and am growing better rapidly.

"Where have you been so long? It seems an age since you left us."

Turtle pointed across the river, and said:

"Leave white friends here. Go over there to mustangs. Get in saddle. Then ride up river in woods. See Lone Wolf. See his warriors. They no find trail. Ride back fast. Turtle, he ride fast to Horse-Head Crossing.

"Ride through river. Then ride down here to white friends. Lone Wolf heap mad. Follow Turtle trail. Must ride fast to Concho. Maybe so see Single-Eye, see Lionel. Soldier Chief heap better. Can ride mustang?"

"I think, if you assist me to the saddle, I can manage to keep my seat, although I am very weak, and have not good control of my limbs.

"I had a terrible siege of torture, Turtle; and, but for you, I must now have been dead. It is life or death with us now. I must ride, if I have to be tied to the saddle. I am ready to start at any time, and the sooner the better.

"Poor Winnie! My heart bleeds for you, darling; but, with Turtle's help, I hope we shall soon be through with our horrible experiences."

"Soldier Chief talk heap good. Come!"

"Don't worry about me, uncle," said Winnie; "I am so rejoiced at our prospects of escape, and thankful that our lives have been spared thus far, that I can think of nothing else. Surely we have reason now to hope for the best."

Turtle lifted the lieutenant upon one of the

horses, the latter shutting his teeth tightly and repressing the groans of agony that the movement caused him; but he soon rallied, when, with his feet in the stirrups, one hand clutching the saddle-horn, and the other the jaw-strap, he announced himself all right.

Winnie was next assisted to mount; and then the Tonkaway sprang aside the remaining horse, and led the way to the edge of the undergrowth, where he paused for a moment, and gazed up the river.

No Apaches, nor indeed any moving objects were within view; and, pointing the direction they were to take, Turtle kept his horse a little in the rear, in order to lash the animals ridden by the lieutenant and Winnie to greater speed, with his quirt.

And on, at first in a slow gallop, went our friends, into the broad open plain, toward the head-waters of the Rio Concho; Turtle gradually increasing their speed, until, at a long reaching gallop they went, leaving the Rio Pecos far in their rear.

The eagle-eyes of the Tonkaway, at times shot glances toward the line of timber to the west; where he expected, each moment, to discover the Apache war-party, quartering toward him and his white friends.

The direction which the little party now traveled, to strike the head-waters of the Rio Concho, from the point at which they had made the start, directly across the Rio Pecos from the central portion of the Sierra Charrate Mountains was due north. Horse-Head Crossing was west from them, and the Pecos flowed southeast from the ford mentioned; consequently, should Lone Wolf be dashing down the river, and discover his intended victims on the plain, he would be forced to quarter on them in the chase, either directly east, or in a somewhat easterly direction, according to the distance he was from Horse-Head Crossing.

Our friends had not galloped more than five miles, when Turtle's keen eyes detected the Apaches galloping down the Pecos, parallel with the same.

However, Lone Wolf and his war-party must have detected the Tonkaway and his white companions at nearly the same moment; for the scattered mob of braves, soon after their hated enemy discovered them, all suddenly jerked their horses' heads, pointing away from the Pecos, and out on the open plains, toward Turtle and the rescued captives.

The Tonkaway plied his quirt, and urged the animals to greater speed; without, however, alarming Winnie, or her uncle, by revealing what he had just perceived, for he deemed it unnecessary until more immediate danger threatened them.

Turtle well knew that the Apaches had galloped their horses, from the camp in the gorge to Horse-head Crossing, the previous night, and then back again.

This was a long run, and although they had probably not been pressed on the trail until nearly to the crossing again, on their return to it, the horses must be greatly fatigued, and far from being able to keep up the speed necessary for the pursuit.

There were now five long miles between the Apaches and his party; and this fact caused the Tonkaway to entertain no alarm as to being overtaken by them.

CHAPTER XXIX.

CONVERGING PATHS.

FULLY twenty miles had Winnie, her uncle, and Turtle, to gallop, from the point where the latter discovered the Apaches turning their horses in pursuit, to the timber of the Concho, just a short distance east of the head-waters of the same.

The only apprehension of the Tonkaway was occasioned by the thought that, possibly his white friends might not be able to stand the run.

He decided that he would not inform them of the fact that their late captors were riding fast in pursuit of them, until he thought such knowledge was needed to cause them to forget their physical sufferings, and through their fears throw off their fatigue—the dread of being again at the mercy of Lone Wolf being the greatest of all incentives to exertion.

Turtle was sure, that neither Winnie, nor the Soldier Chief would discover the Apaches of their own accord; as they were obliged to hold fast, and pay strict attention to their animals, if they would keep their positions in their saddles.

The Tonkaway soon saw that about the same distance was maintained between his foes and his own party, as at the first; although the Apaches had some advantage, in the quartering course which they traveled. He knew that, unless some accident occurred in his party, the Concho could be reached in time to dash through the timber, proceed up on the north side of the same, and thus secure a hiding-place before sunset.

Not only this; but he had every reason to expect Single-Eye and Lionel, if not troops from Camp Johnston, to be at the Concho near its head-waters, for their evening rest, previous to proceeding on toward Horse-Head Crossing.

We will now leave the faithful Tonkaway, lashing his own and the horses of Lieutenant Warrington and Winnie toward the Rio Concho; the Apaches, afar off, in a frenzy of murderous fury, also lashing their panting mustangs after their hated foe and their recent captives. We leave them so, for there are those speeding toward the same point on the Concho from the north that have our sympathy.

They are leading characters in our drama, and are now galloping down the Concho; while still another party of horsemen steal through the timber, along the banks of the stream, also toward its source, seeming to fear detection.

Though each of these three parties is ignorant of the presence of the others, all are bent upon the same mission—the rescue of Winnie and her uncle, and vengeance upon the Apaches.

On galloped Turtle and his white friends, the latter becoming fainter and fainter, and both clinging to their saddles with desperate grip and bringing all their fortitude and strength of will to the front; for the Tonkaway had been forced, by their protests against maintaining such speed, to bid them look toward the Rio Pecos.

That glance was sufficient to put an end to their further complaints. Their apprehensions were great until Turtle assured them that did they strive to control themselves and bear up until the timber ahead was reached he would promise them safety. He asserted that the Apaches had not gained a half-mile since he had first seen them, notwithstanding their favorable position in the chase; it being a matter of impossibility for the red demons to cut them off from the Concho.

Now, as the winding, snake-like line of timber in their front grew more and more distinct, and the glances of the poor sufferers proved the words of their guide to be true, both became imbued with hope, relief, and joy.

Winnie recalled the assertion that Single-Eye and Lionel were on the trail, and she hoped—oh, so earnestly!—that the latter was indeed fast approaching the Concho upon its opposite side where the trail led.

The keen eyes of Turtle scanned the plain to the north, as well as to the south, along the timber line; but no indications of the presence of human beings could be discovered.

On sprung the three horses under the lash of the Tonkaway's quirt, foam flying from their mouths on all sides, over the prairie grass and flowers, until they could distinguish one tree from another. The Concho timber was but a short distance in their front, and little dreamed they that danger lurked even there in the green shades.

And thus we will leave them to inspect those parties to whom allusion has already been made.

On the opposite side of the Rio Concho from the point toward which our three friends are approaching, and about the same distance from the timber which hides all the plain toward the Pecos from their view—also urging their horses to their greatest possible speed—come Single-Eye and Lionel Lacrosse.

The latter has no hat, it having been lost at the desperate fight at the ford, and his long wavy hair flies wild and free in the breeze created by his speed. His handsome face is pale as death. His dark-brown eyes are staring with intense concern toward the timber, and at times up and down the same, as if expecting to catch a view of the red foes that have borne Winnie Warrington to a horrible fate.

The old scout, however, has asserted, and he himself knows, that long ere this the Apaches are on the south side of the Rio Pecos, and that the condition of their animals is such that a

halt must be made, or they will fall dead in their tracks.

Lionel, from necessity, has agreed to halt in the timber; but, nevertheless, he hopes to see the form of a red foe, some lingerer on the trail, that he may vent his ungovernable thirst for revenge.

Single-Eye has often closed his solitary optic as he drove spurs into the flanks of Skip-lively to evade the wondering and reproachful look of his steed at the unusual cruelty of its master, who, as he at times catches that glance unawares, cries out, in a voice of blended pity and remorse:

"Skip, dang my cats ef I kin help hit! We-une bes gut ter git Winnie an' ther lootenant outen ther scrape what they's in, er flop down on ther trail, turn over, an' make a glide inter kingdom come."

"Ef yer'll keep yer vim up, Skip, an' skute ther bestest yer kin toward the Pecos, I hope I'll be blind ef I doesn't git a glass eye fer yer when I nex' strike San Antone. Then yer'll hev ther best o' me, an' kin put on hefty alrs."

In this strain the old scout went on, but the mind of Lionel was in such a state of intense anguish that he seemed not to hear him, even when addressed directly by him.

Not one thought of the "Blackbirds" had entered the minds of either Lionel or Single-Eye since starting on the trail, their whole determination being that they would reach the Pecos. Neither did they waste a thought in connection with the troops, as they had decided at the ford, when passing, that no patrol from Camp Johnston would discover the proofs of the massacre until too late to overtake Lone Wolf before the latter reached his stronghold.

Thus on dashed Lionel and the scout, destined to enter the timber on the westerly side of the Concho at the same time that Turtle and the rescued captives darted into it on the easterly side, the belt of timber being here very narrow, and the stream but a little brook.

Had these two parties pointed a short half-mile further up the stream, both would have ridden directly into the camp of a detachment of the U. S. Second Cavalry, which had been dispatched immediately toward the Rio Pecos upon the command of Camp Johnston being informed of the massacre.

A bend in the Concho hid the plain toward the Pecos from their view. This prevented them from discovering the fugitives flying before the Apaches; and the condition of themselves and horses demanding immediate attention, no scout had been sent around the bend, there being no probability that any Indians were on the north side of the Pecos.

This detachment had passed down the Concho, on its eastern side, and parallel with it; but, had their line of march been half a mile further from the timber, they would have struck a trail that would have amazed them, causing them to hasten on in place of encamping, for it was that of the "Blackbirds." The trail was fresh, not more than a couple of hours having passed since the outlaws had galloped up toward the head-waters of the Rio Concho.

And, within the timber, at the very point that Turtle, Winnie and the lieutenant were approaching on one side, and Lionel Lacrosse and Single-Eye on the other, were encamped this horde of desperate outlaws and deserters under Captain Blackbird, who, insanely anxious to get Winnie Warrington in his power, had induced his followers to proceed in the direction of Mexico; which, indeed, was the only sure refuge for them.

Once there, he promised to lead them on forays, that would bring untold gold and supplies to their new rendezvous, which he proposed establishing in the Apache Mountains; trusting to future movements and developments to give him an opportunity to attack the war-party of Lone Wolf, and get Winnie into his power. This he believed could be accomplished on the Rio Pecos, where the Apaches would doubtless halt for rest, and to recruit their horses.

Thus, by a strange combination of circumstances, all the surviving parties who had been connected with the horrible occurrences near the confluence of the Concho and Colorado Rivers, were now being drawn by fate toward each other again.

The avengers of the massacred soldiers, also were near at hand, but would not have proved of any service to those who most needed their protection, had not one of their number, while staking his horse to grass, a little beyond the

bend, discovered the approaching Apaches, and given the alarm.

This brought all to "boots and saddles" without a bugle note; and caused spurs to dash deep, as the gallant boys of the Second Cavalry drew sabers, and stole through the timber upstream, to surprise or ambush the fast nearing red murderers of their comrades.

And all were ignorant of the presence of the "Blackbirds," the scouts, or the rescued officer and his niece, the "Angel of the Army."

CHAPTER XXX.

GREEK MEETS GREEK.

NEVER did cool green shades appear more like paradise than did the timber of the Rio Concho to Lieutenant Warrington and poor Winnie, both nearly ready to fall from their staggering steeds when they reached it.

During the latter part of the race, it was apparent to the fugitives that the Apaches had gained upon them. This was so; for Turtle felt confident that he could proceed up or down within the timber until dark without being discovered. Consequently, they had not proceeded in the mad gallop of the first part of the race, as they drew nearer the dark timber.

The "Blackbirds," knowing the dangers by which they are encompassed—the hands of both red and white men being against them—did not dare stake their horses or show themselves; but secured the animals here and there in cover, where a small opening offered sufficient grass.

Their equipments were all piled within a clear space, of something like a quarter of an acre in extent, and near the stream. All had yet some liquor left in their canteens and flasks, besides a supply of provisions in their saddle-bags. This they had collected from boxes and casks that had been blown from the cabin in the explosion, and had been saved from the flames. They were now reclining in all manner of positions on the sward, or against trees and banks; their guns lying here and there, showing by this the general confusion and absence of sentinels, and that Captain Blackbird, in the present condition of his affairs, dared not attempt strict discipline.

Eating and drinking, arguing and cursing, their faces red and bloated, and their eyes bloodshot; this, and the strange mingling of rags and fine garments—no two costumes being alike—caused the outlaw horde to appear most peculiar, fantastic and brutal.

Evolving plans for the future in his unscrupulous and depraved mind, Captain Blackbird lay upon the ground; and it was this position that enabled him to detect the rumbling tramp of the horses of our three friends as they approached the timber. Thinking, however, that they might belong to some of his own men, he arose carelessly, and passed toward the eastern border of the timber; not wishing to create an alarm without good cause.

When the bandit chief reached a point from which he could look out over the plain, his surprise was great, to see an Indian, a U. S. officer, and a female approaching at all the speed their fagged animals could maintain.

To Blackbird it appeared that the Indian must be in pursuit of the two whites; and thoughts of Winnie Warrington now came into his mind, the presence of the officer strangely exciting him.

As he gazed, the head of the female appeared above the ears of her horse, and then one glance was sufficient. Captain Blackbird saw before him the very maiden who ruled his thoughts; her golden hair flying in the breeze, her face upturned as if in prayer. He saw nothing more. Had he looked beyond, over the plain, the Apache war party would have met his astonished view.

He waited but a moment, seeing that his long-coveted prize was speeding directly toward him.

Bounding back among his followers, he cried out:

"Jump and speed, boys! Never mind your rifles. There's game coming right into our camp. Look sharp, and don't let those who gallop in here get away from us!"

By a sweep of his arms, the outlaw chief indicated a series of positions for his men to occupy, forming a half-circle between their camp and the edge of the timber; while he himself took a central position.

The next moment there followed a crashing of undergrowth, mingled with the labored tramp and heavy breathing of horses, and Lieutenant Warrington and his niece, while

prayers of thankfulness were on their parched lips, dashed in among the trees, only to be rudely torn from their horses by the mob of outlaws, who rushed from all sides upon them.

Turtle, the Tonkaway, who was some paces in the rear, jerked his horse to a halt, his black eyes blazing with fury, and his face filled with consternation.

Had the earth opened and swallowed up his friends, he would not have been more astounded; but his thoughts flew like lightning. He was not one that was easily taken aback by sudden and unlooked-for events, and his plans were soon formed.

The attention of Captain Blackbird was fixed upon his fair captive; the deserters, and in fact all the others, being attracted toward the officer.

None except the chief of the band knew of the Indian's presence; and in an instant the latter had whirled his horse, and shot out from the timber, down its edge, and into the dense shades again.

Turtle had at once realized that it would be madness for him to attempt to save his white friends; and the fact that the Apaches were coming madly on, gave him some hope of being yet able to rescue, a second time, the Soldier Chief and Winnie. He had recognized the "bad white men," and recalling their dastard deeds at the Colorado ford, was convinced that the captives were in quite as bad hands as they had been before.

A glance showed the Tonkaway that the Apaches were now lashing their animals in a frantic manner, to reach the timber before their intended victims could make any great distance in the bottom, and secrete themselves.

This pleased Turtle, for he felt positive that the "bad white men" did not know of the approach of the war-party.

At once he decided that, if he could gain a position near the stream, to the west of the camp of the "Blackbirds," when the rush of the Apaches came from the east, he would have an opportunity of saving his friends.

He resolved, at all events, to make the attempt.

Urging his horse down the stream, and careful not to betray his presence, the Tonkaway gained the position he aimed at.

Neither Winnie nor her uncle made the slightest outcry when pulled from their horses. The former recognized Captain Blackbird as Bird Blackwell, and the officer knew the deserters as such. Both saw that they had fallen into the hands of men as merciless as the Apaches; and hopeless now, they only prayed that they might be permitted to lie down and die.

Blackbird saw that they could not escape, he therefore forbade his men binding them. He had also to protect Lieutenant Warrington from being killed by the deserters, assuring them that the officer would be a benefit to them alive, and no possible use when dead.

Great was the exultation of the outlaw chief. Fortune had, in this case, favored him greatly.

He had no longer to invent an excuse to attack Lone Wolf's war-party, and run the chances of being shot by some of his own men when they should realize that he had jeopardized their lives for a personal object.

He now wished to start for the Rio Grande as soon as possible, for all that he had wished and longed for was in his hands. He had in his power the only maiden who had ever impressed his callous heart, and in securing her he accomplished his most desired revenge upon Lionel Lacrosse.

Sooner or later Lionel would find out that he was no longer believed to be the assassin of Captain Warrington. Then the young ranchero would return to Salado Creek, only to find that he, Blackbird, had beaten him in the game at last—that Winnie was not waiting there for him, but had been captured by bandits on the Rio Concho and taken to Mexico!

Yes, and Lionel should know who it was that had Winnie Warrington as a prize.

This it was that had decided him to prevent Lieutenant Warrington from being killed by the deserters.

He would let the officer go free presently, in order that the intelligence of his success might reach the ears of Lionel Lacrosse.

With folded arms the bandit chief stood gazing at the captives that had so unexpectedly fallen into his hands. The great beauty of the maiden seemed to have impressed the entire

band, and for a time they all stood around in silence, soon, however, returning to their lunch and bottles.

But to return to Turtle, the Tonkaway.

Our red friend, as has been said, gained a position on the opposite side of the stream from the camp of the outlaws, and silently dismounted. His intention was to crawl to some thicket on the bank, from whence he could view the camp, get the position of his white friends, and be ready for a rush to save the latter when the Apaches should charge in from the east plain.

His horse, he knew, would stand where he had left him, for he had allowed the animal to drink, and it could crop the tall bottom-grass and rest from its terrible gallop without any inclination to gallop for some time to come.

At the very moment that Turtle was about to crawl toward the stream he was brought to his feet, and whirled about facing the west, by a peculiar signal. It sounded exactly like the warning of a rattlesnake—in fact, it was produced by one twirled rapidly on a horse-hair.

The eyes of the Tonkaway showed plainly that the sound had filled him with relief and joy.

He had, by this time, torn the screen from his *totem*, and removed the Apache war-stripes; standing in all the glory and war-paint of his people, his eagle-feathers being again thrust into his beaded fillet.

He had done this previous to starting for the Rio Pecos with his white friends, saying to them at the time:

"Turtle he get shot, mebhe so. Want sing death-song with Tonkaway paint on face. Have Apache paint, go happy hunting-grounds of Apache when die. Turtle want go to his fathers. Put on Tonkaway paint."

A moment after the signal, the voice that he expected struck his ears, in a hoarse, half-whisper.

"Dog-gone my gran'marm's forty-fust cousin's ole black cat's fust litter o' kittens! Tonk', what in ther name o' Davy Crockett air ther surprise-party yer hes gut ahead? Dang hit, whar in thunderation air Winnie an' ther lootenant? I hes 'pended a heap on yer, Tonk', an' I sw'ar I hopes yer hain't lost ther trail!"

"How come yer hyer? Spit her out, er I'll go plum' crazy, an' make a spasmodic die of hit. Don't look thet-a-way, Lionell! I'd ruther yer'd shove yer bowie plum' through my bestest business 'nattermy."

As the young planter recognized Turtle, he became almost ghastly in appearance; his lips moved, and a gurgling sound showed that he was endeavoring to ask the same questions that the old scout had done.

The Tonkaway spoke quickly, in a low tone:

"Turtle say go on trail. Turtle did go on trail. Ride over Pecos. Ride so many mustangs"—holding up three fingers—"Steal horses. Kill Apache at Horse-Head Crossing. Ride fast down Pecos."

"Lone Wolf he camp in mountains. Take Winnie. Take Soldier Chief. Lone Wolf, he ride fast to Horse-Head Crossing. Take warriors. Yell heap. No catch Turtle. Turtle get Winnie, get Soldier Chief over Pecos. Up high bank. Hide in wood. Lone Wolf come back. No find trail. Heap mad. Turtle cross Pecos. Take Winnie, take Soldier Chief toward Concho."

"Lone Wolf go back crossing. Find Turtle trail. So many horses"—holding up three fingers—"See Turtle. See Winnie. See Soldier Chief, on plain. Ride fast. Come to Concho."

"Bad white men in trees there"—pointing southeast. "Pull Winnie, pull Soldier Chief off mustang. Turtle ride quick up Concho. Then come in bush here. Want save Winnie, want save Soldier Chief when Apaches come."

"Bad white men no see Apaches. Wait. Soon hear war-cry of Lone Wolf. He kill bad white men. Turtle, Single-Eye, Lionell, run over Concho. Get Winnie, get Soldier Chief. Then ride fast. Apache kill bad white men. Kill Blackbird Chief. Good. Turtle heap glad. What white brothers say? Turtle talk done."

Both Lionel and Single Eye grasped each a hand of the Tonkaway, their eyes speaking volumes of gratitude.

Amazement, joy, and relief unbounded were in their faces; but, the next instant, all sprung toward the camp of the outlaws, for the blood-curdling Apache war-cry filled the air, and rung up and down the arched vistas of the Concho.

CHAPTER XXXI.

REUNION AND RETRIBUTION.

WITH weapons in hand, all eager to save the long-suffering ones, the three men, the Tonkaway in the lead, sprung over the narrow stream to the opening in which the outlaw camp was situated.

Crashing through the undergrowth, an avalanche of hideous war-painted braves, and wild-eyed, foaming, maddened mustangs, on came the Apaches in a terrible charge, Lone Wolf at their head, none realizing, until right upon them, that there was an encampment of whites in their front.

At first glance the Apache chief knew it was no ambush, but that he had surprised the whites as well as being himself surprised; hence the sounding war-cry and the crashing charge, accompanied by a cloud of arrows.

Captain Blackbird, first of all, became aware of the approach of a large body of horsemen, and knew instinctively that his game was up; for he felt positive that a detachment of troops was upon him.

Resolved not to be balked when the prize he had striven at such fearful cost to gain was at length his own, he clasped the shuddering maiden in his arms as the horrible Apache war-whoops again tortured her ears—the signal of a fate far worse than death, a fate from which she had but just been saved by the Tonkaway!

As the Apaches charged toward the camp, the outlaw chief, with Winnie in his arms, she limp and senseless from fright, despair and horror, sprung down the bank amid the trees. The golden hair of the young girl flew wildly over her shoulders, and this Lionel Lacrosse saw and noticed. With far-reaching bounds he sprung in pursuit, his eyes lit up with a murderous fire, his muscles swelled, his teeth set, and a long bowie gripped tightly in his right hand.

Two or three Apaches barred his way and strove to urge their steeds upon him; but on like a resistless whirlwind he went, bounding upward and grasping the red warriors in a vise-like grip, cleaving them open with his bowie and hurling them aside like chaff. Thus on in pursuit of his hated foe, whose life-blood he had sworn must be shed by himself alone.

On through bush and reeds, the golden hair of his darling his only guide, went Lionel Lacrosse.

But Bird Blackwell gained his horse, mounted, and was off upon the plain in a moment's time.

"Oh, my God! A horse! My life for a horse!"

Thus shrieked Lionel, and, ere the last word had left his lips, loud, clear and silvery, above whoops and yells, rung the bugle sounding the charge!

Back toward the scene of the fight, in frenzied fury, rushed Lionel, dashing through the thicket to his own black steed, upon which he sprung and spurred for life on the return.

Through the bottom he shot as fast as his jade horse could run, when, right in his path, he sees a riderless cavalry horse, comparatively fresh and full of fire and the frenzy born of battle scenes and sounds.

He gives one torturing dash of his spurs that draws a groan from his noble black, as well as from himself; but life and death are trembling in the balance—ay, and far more.

The black steed plunged forward to the cavalry horse. The latter, headed off by a dense and thorny thicket, swerved aside; and, with one foot suddenly raised upon the saddle, Lionel gave a bound in the air and came down upon the cavalry horse.

Gathering the reins, he drives spurs and shoots out from the timber upon the open plain; and, but two rifle-shots away, he discovers Bird Blackwell, striving to urge his fagged horse toward the Rio Pecos.

On flies Lionel.

He knows—he knew at a glance—that Winnie Warrington could be saved.

The labored gait of the outlaw's horse told him this; and on he flies, while to his right sound the rattle of revolvers, war-whoops, yells of agony, shrieks of despair, and rallying-cries.

Little cares the young ranchero for these.

His eyes are fixed upon that golden hair—more golden now, from the last red rays of the declining sun shimmering through its meshes as the wavy masses fly free in the prairie air.

And on, in the rear of Lionel, comes Single-Eye.

He is mounted, as a matter of course, upon Skip-lively; the animal, affrighted at the bed-

lam of sounds and having had but a brief rest.

Soon Lionel arrived within a pistol-shot of his hated foe—of the dastard who had murdered Captain Warrington, only that he might fasten the cowardly crime upon himself; who had caused him to fly from his butchered father's corpse to evade an ignominious death. Who had made him to be, as far as he knew, an outlaw; condemned to roam the wilds, it might be for his lifetime.

And now, the fiendish dastard, who had assassinated the father, clasps the daughter in his polluting arms, aiming at her ruin, both in body and soul.

A fierce and vengeful yell bursts from Lionel, as all this rushes through his maddened brain.

A few more bounds of his horse, and the crisis comes.

"Bird Blackwell! Coward, miscreant, devil, halt! Halt, I say! Or, by the gods, I'll cut the flesh from your bones by inch pieces, while you yet live! I'll skin you alive!"

"Halt, I say! And if but a hair is gone from that fair girl's head, I'll burn you by a slow fire!"

"An Apache is not more merciless than I am toward such as you, Bird Blackwell—I, Lionel Lacrosse!"

As the last words were yelled, the horse of the young planter was close upon that of the outlaw, and the latter, with ashen face, and abject terror in his eyes, gazed over his shoulder.

The next moment, the bowie of Lionel crashed through the shoulder of the bandit; and Winnie was caught by the left arm of her preserver, as that of Blackbird dropped paralyzed by his side, and his horse came suddenly to a halt.

The steed of the outlaw rolled over upon the leg of its rider, holding him, beyond escape; and, at that moment, Single-Eye rode up, exclaiming:

"Dog my cats, Lionel! Yer hes gut leetle Winnie at last. Keep an ormighty tight grip on her, I 'vise; yer, though I reckon we'll make ther rifle."

"But, ef Uncle Samwell's boyees didn't come in on ther right deal this hyer time, I'm chawin' scorpions fer reg'lar grub ther nex' six moons."

"Ther Tonk' jist waded in, an' tore 'Pache ha'r, till he got cooled down a leetle; fust off hidin' ther lootenant whar he wouldn't git hurted. Gi'n me a gaze et Winnie. Hit'll do my peepers a heap o' good, es well es Skip's."

"Poor Winnie," said Lionel; "she has indeed had more than her share of suffering and horrors. Let us hope that happiness may be hers henceforth."

"Dang'd ef thar hain't bin a heap o' cussedness scooped up, an' slung ont'er both on yer!"

"She shows bit in her purty face, es well es you does; but we'll be O. K. arter this, I reckon."

"Dang thet condemned cuss of a kiote! I'd like ter choke his dang'd breath out. What's a-goin' ter be did with him, Lionel?"

Thus adjured, Lionel addressed the prostrate outlaw:

"You acknowledge, Bird Blackwell, that you shot Captain Warrington, from a thicket on Salado Creek; and that you did it with the intention of fastening the crime on me, in order that you might have a clear field to win the daughter of the man whom you murdered?"

"Not only this, but that, just now you were spending toward Mexico, after, like the coward that you are, deserting your fellow criminals, having abducted this young lady—you whose hands are stained with the blood of her father?"

"Yes," groaned the outlaw chief; "I'll acknowledge anything, if you'll pull that beast off me. My leg is crushed to a perfect jelly!"

Just then, the old scout cried out:

"Come on, Lionel! Spur fer yer life—fer Winnie's life! Ther red scarifiers air a-comin', jist a-b'ilin'. Blackbird, so long! Lone Wolf air a-comin' ter interduc' himself."

As he spoke, both men drove spurs, speeding northeast to evade the surviving Apaches, who, with Lone Wolf in the lead, sped from the timber. At the same moment, piercing the air, in dread and horror, came the shrieks of Captain Blackbird, as he realized that he was there fastened in the track of the retreating Apaches.

And well might the wretch shriek in terror; for the frantic Indians sprung from their

horses and cut and hacked the bandit chief in pieces. Then, with exultant whoops, and waving his scalp in the air, they dashed toward the Rio Pecos.

Single-Eye and Lionel, with their precious charge, circled around, returning to the scene of the fight; Turtle meeting them at the edge of the timber, while by his side stood the commander of the detachment.

Such had been the surprise of the outlaws, undisciplined as they were, and their chief having deserted them, that they fell an easy prey to the Apaches; and the charge of the cavalry in the rear of the Indians, came near ending in their complete annihilation.

But the cunning and strategy of Lone Wolf never deserted him.

Ordering his braves to follow him as soon as he saw the utter madness of attempting a stand against the "long-knives," all galloped into the thick timber beyond the Concho; thence up, and across again, lashing their horses toward the Pecos, and leaving fully one-half of their number pierced by the bullets of the boys of the Second Cavalry.

Captain Reynolds, who commanded the detachment, sent two of his men back to Camp Johnston for an ambulance, with which to convey Lieutenant Warrington and his niece to the station.

The outlaws in their demoralization, had fallen an easy prey to the Apaches; those who escaped death, and fled to the opposite side of the stream, being filled with arrows by the infuriated followers of Lone Wolf, in their retreat from the cavalry, the bodies of the slain being horribly mutilated.

The ringing war-cry of the Tonkaway was not unheard in the terrible fray, and being recognized by the frenzied Apaches, made them more furious; but where his eagle feathers flaunted in the fight, there fell many a brave before his sinewy arm.

The timber in the vicinity of the bandit camp was strewn with the slain, both red and white; and the once pearly stream was deeply ensanguined.

Five of the cavalry boys lay dead, their sabers tight clutched in the death-grip, and others were wounded.

Captain Reynolds ordered an immediate removal to their former encampment, and the burial of the slain.

The wounded were borne upon hastily-constructed litters to the cavalry camp, where all was done that could be done to relieve their sufferings.

Lieutenant Warrington and Winnie were tenderly cared for, and nothing was left undone that could promote their comfort.

The joy of Single-Eye at the happy termination of his war-trail was manifested in extravagant language, mostly, however, addressed to Skip-lively, who received his full share of praise for his herculean exertions on the run to save the captives.

Turtle, the center of all eyes, stood with folded arms near Winnie and the lieutenant, the greater part of his time, when not wandering in the bottom for game with Single-Eye; and, although his stoical face showed nothing of the joy that he felt at the safety of his white friends, the feeling was there none the less.

His daring entrance of the Apache camp was the talk of all, and the gratitude of Winnie and her uncle knew no bounds.

Four days later all returned to Camp Johnston, and Lieutenant Warrington, having received a sick furlough, decided to accompany his niece to Salado Creek. His consent was freely given to her union with Lionel Lacrosse; but he advised the latter never to venture again on the frontiers, although he himself vowed eternal vengeance on the Apaches.

In due time, escorted by Turtle, Single-Eye, and Lionel, the ambulance arrived at the ranch of the Browns, on the Salado; and great rejoicing there was at their return, especially on the part of Lionel's friend Baldy.

Another great gathering of the rancheros, with their wives and children, followed the arrival of our friends, and the most interesting part of the proceedings was the marriage of the hero and heroine.

Single-Eye and Turtle were of course present, and none had heartier congratulations for the happy pair.

By look and manner, if not in words, every one showed their pleasure in the return of the young ranchero, and their sincere regret and sympathy for his having been so unjustly

forced from his home, through the foul crime of another.

When the father of Bird Blackwell was informed of the terrible end of his wretched son, he could not but give a sigh of relief; for he had dreaded that he might again visit his boyhood's home, and in some way add to his already fearful guilt.

Lacrosse Ranch was rebuilt in the same manner as previously; Lionel striving in every way to have the dwelling resemble the only home that he had ever known, and which he hoped now to make his and Winnie's while both should live.

His father, as well as the murdered negroes, had been buried by the rancheros, and a monument was now erected over the victims of the Indian massacre.

The body of Captain Warrington was, at his daughter's request, brought from Powder House Hill, and placed by the side of Major Lacrosse; thus enabling both Lionel and his wife to sit by the graves of their murdered parents, and weep over their tragic ends.

Thus situated, united at last, and as happy as they had been previously wretched, we leave Lionel Lacrosse and his charming wife, Winnette.

We will only add that the cattle, horses and mules of Lacrosse Ranch became well known as superior animals, and that Lionel became a wealthy ranchero; while merry little ones played amid the prairie flowers around the ranch.

And often, Single-Eye and Turtle, upon returning from the long trails taken in avenging many a massacred borderer, might be seen upon the broad veranda, the master and mistress of which were happy beyond comprehension in the presence of their beautiful children, and these two noble and tried friends.

Skip-lively always came in for a share of the warm welcome that his master was sure to receive; and, on more than one war-trail, the vengeful yell of Lionel Lacrosse mingled with the wild whoop of the old scout, and the ringing war-cry of Turtle, the Tonkaway.

Lionel had not forgotten his terrible torture, nor the oath that he had sworn over the mutilated corpse of his father.

And on Salado Creek, our hero and his fair wife still reside.

It is a happy home; their happiness being, as the reader knows, well earned and merited—a recompense, even in this life, for terrible experiences, unjustly inflicted, and nobly borne.

THE END.

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